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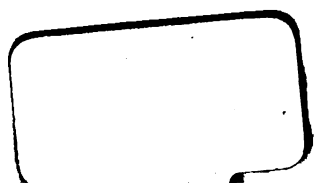
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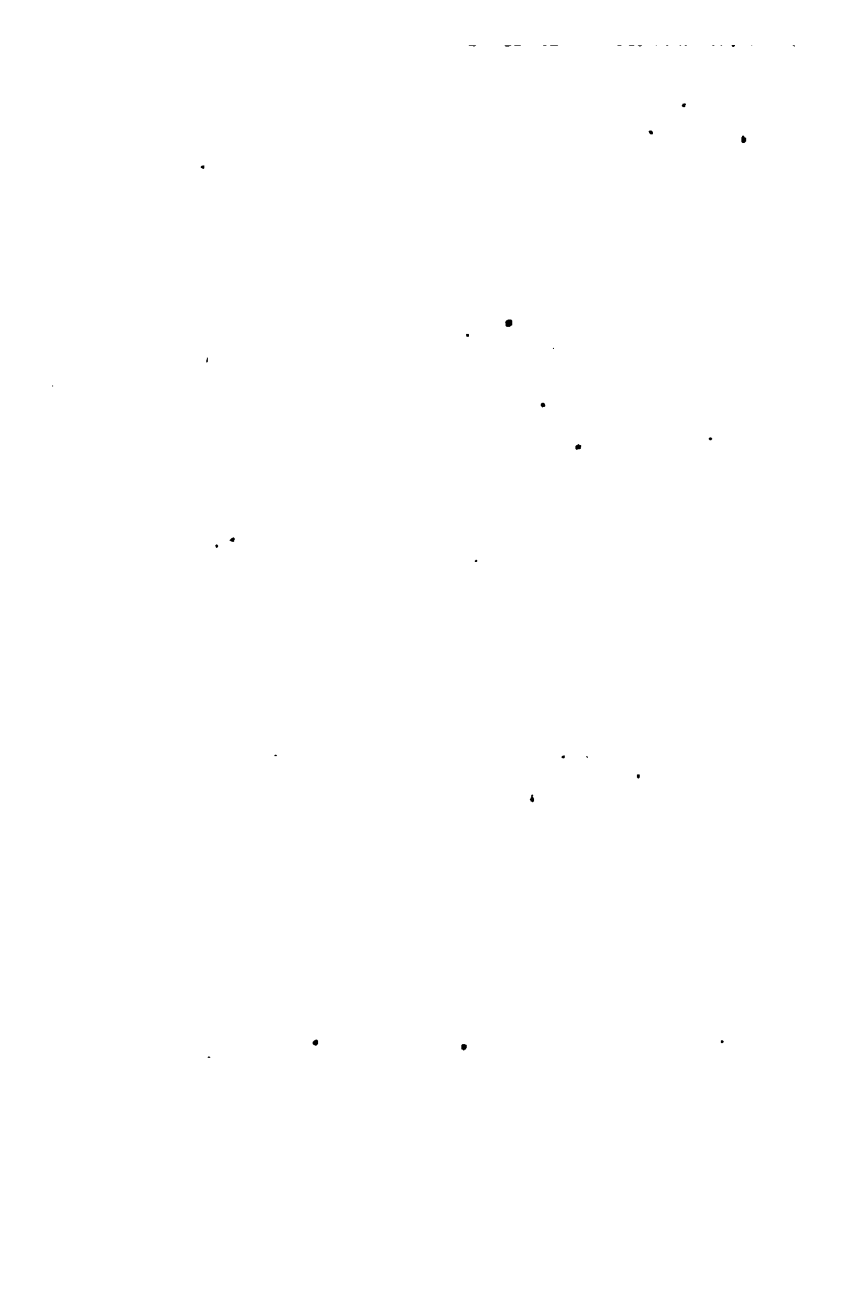
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THIS TRANSITORY LIFE.

THIS TRANSITORY LIFE:

Seven Lectures

DESIGNED TO HELP

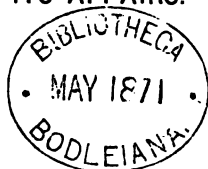
THOUGHTFUL YOUNG PERSONS

CORRECTLY TO ESTIMATE

THE PRESENT WORLD AND ITS AFFAIRS.

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM HUDSON.



"Vanitas est, longam vitam optare, et de bonâ vitâ parum curare. Vanitas est, præsentem vitam solùm attendere: et quæ futura sunt, non prævidere."—*Thomas à Kempis*.

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PREFACE.

 HIS little book is intended to supply what is supposed to be a want. I trust it is, so far as it goes, a positive addition to the practical theology of the day. At least, I have no acquaintance with any treatise the place of which it can be, even apparently, designed or adapted to take. It owes its existence partly to a conviction resulting from the experience and observation of years, and partly to a brief illness. During that illness I was obliged to abstain from public speech, and became apprehensive about my future communications with the minds of men. I asked myself what I could do for the good of my fellow-creatures, if I should not be permitted to speak to them from the pulpit. It appeared to me that I might be of use if I prepared for the

press some of the thoughts of that searching time ; and I began accordingly to put them into order. Afterwards, circumstances having through Divine mercy changed, it seemed desirable to speak these thoughts from the pulpit and elsewhere. Thus my book has become a volume of lectures. The original purpose was considerably to extend the number of specific subjects, and to publish a volume twice as large as this. Subsequently it was deemed sufficient to try the reading public with what is here presented, and wise to reserve the rest until it be really, or at least apparently, called for. If such a time come, a sequel to this volume will, I hope, be published. If encouragement be given, and if life and health be granted me, I shall be prepared to publish also a treatise on the Christian Life. Materials for both have been collected. In the mean time, my hope as to this book is, that it will promote correct thinking and devout reference to the Word of God. If this hope be realised, the reader will be prompted to the religious discharge of every duty, and my practical aim will have had some success.

My aim has not been to write a pretty or beautiful book. Work of this kind I can cheerfully leave at present to other hands. I have striven to say the proper thing in a clear and intelligible

way. Of my performance of this self-imposed task others will judge. Of some of its imperfections I am deeply sensible; but this has not seemed to be a sufficient reason for refusing to publish. The style is naturally that of public address. I have not been anxious to exclude all marks of the way in which the contents of the book were originally used. I am one of those who believe that public addresses on practical religious subjects are instruments of usefulness which God has greatly blessed; and I think what is well worth hearing on a public occasion may well be worth reading and considering in private, though it be still in the same style and form.

A few thoughts will be found recurring in sundry places. This is because I have been particularly wishful to impress those thoughts on the minds of those for whom these addresses have been designed. Probably they chiefly give the book its character, such as it is. According to the value attached to them, whether it be much or little, will probably be the reader's judgment of the whole book. Reading, observation, experience, and reflection have conspired to bring me to a state of mind in which strong sympathy is felt with the following petitions taken from the Book of Common Prayer:—" *And we most humbly*

beseech Thee of Thy goodness, O Lord, to comfort and succour all them who in THIS TRANSITORY LIFE are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity. And we also bless Thy holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear, beseeching Thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of Thy heavenly kingdom. Grant this, O Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen." These petitions express my desires on behalf of every reader of the following pages.

But why, some may ask, should a book like this be commended to young persons? The reason seems to be good and strong. It is taken for granted that there is a time when every reflective youth finds his mind stirred to its depths by such questions as this book is *intended* to answer. If the answers attempted are according to the oracles of God, they are true, and cannot mislead. An effort has been made to give such answers. Youth is the seed-time of life. Many have sowed in folly or error, and reaped in misery. I wish to help to prevent my readers from doing this. A wrong turn in early years may lead immeasurably far astray. A bad or questionable beginning can hardly be believed to involve a good or satisfactory

end. This must, in such a case, be preceded by a change. If, by this book, any devious pilgrim be brought back to the right way, or any traveller just setting out be prevented from entering wrong paths, the little labour involved in its production will be amply repaid. It is a serious thing to put a book of any considerable moral force into the hands of youth. Before a man does this, he should have reasonable confidence that he knows what he is about, and can do good. I have not forgotten the time when a religious book, that took my fancy, would produce a very sensible and abiding effect on my mental state; and this has had, I trust, its due influence upon me while writing what follows.

W. H.

LONDON, OCTOBER 11, 1870.



THIS TRANSITORY LIFE.

I.—THE SOJOURN.

IN the stage of existence through which man passes on earth there are many things the utter mysteriousness of which deeply and variously affects the thoughtful mind. Questions are constantly arising to which it is simply impossible to find satisfactory answers. As the difficulty cannot be entirely removed, it is natural to desire to know how its oppressiveness may be relieved. This can be effectually done only by referring the matter in faith to God. Such a state, with its numerous perplexities and trials of mind, seems to belong properly to the creature man, because of the limits necessary to his vision and knowledge; and to one in such a state are secured the possibility and the means of a most valuable discipline, as I hope hereafter somewhat fully to show. In the meanwhile, let it be kept in mind that God is absolutely wise; that He rules His own world; that in human life we see the results of His choice and appointments, together with the operation and effects of the sin by which man has marred the Creator's work; and that many men have been made serious by considering the mysteries of life,

and the lessons which they may be designed to teach, while some have been greatly assisted by such things in becoming good and useful to their fellow-men.

But many things belonging to this life are very plain, and need not be mistaken. Indeed, such things are so numerous, that there is ample scope for certain and definite thinking; and the lives of holy men show that devout thought on the unmistakable facts of life can become the means of great spiritual good. Let a few of these facts, as to which all must agree, be instanced.

Human life on earth is short. About this there can be no doubt, except in the minds of the very young. Here, then, is a fact which appears to have men's attention; and how can a man, who has proper views of the brevity of his life, utterly forget it in his daily conduct? The actions of thoughtful men show that this fact has great influence. How many projects intelligently formed have been abandoned for want of time, because it became clear that life would be too short for their working out! And how many men have been led by meditation on the brevity of life to greatly increased activity in Christian work or in secular business, lest they should not keep pace with the inevitable advance of years, but should die without finishing the work which they had set themselves to do!

Human life on earth is uncertain. A child born yesterday may live through threescore years and ten; but no one knows that so long a period will be granted; and there is improbability that the life so recently begun will continue very long. A man in health to-day may be attacked to-morrow by a disease which will limit his stay on earth to a few weeks, or to a few days,

or even to a few hours. A company of men steadily discharging the duties of their calling and full of vigour and pleasant talk, may be suddenly scattered and killed by the unlooked-for bursting of a boiler; or unsuspecting passengers, comfortably seated in first-class railway carriages and anticipating nothing strange, may be enveloped without warning in flames and held in the strong arms of death before they can know what it is that affects them. Such things make us see that "in the midst of life we are in death"; and who cannot find here an instructive and influential subject of thought? This manifest uncertainty of life has much influence on the conduct of men. This influence shows itself in the multiplication and great success of life assurance societies, and in other such things; and thoughts on the same subject are suggested by the character of the salutations and looks of parting friends, who know they must be separate for weeks or months, and who fear they may never meet again on earth.

Human life on earth is a strange mixture. There is in it much that is painful, and there may be in it much that is pleasant. Pain is more easily remembered than common pleasures. A thousand hours of ordinary comfort may be utterly forgotten, while one hour of intense pain is vividly recollected. This may be true also of physical good and evil of other kinds. Consequently we are liable to err as to the relative amounts of the good and the evil of this life. But how few can truly say that they have had more of evil than of good! How few, when they calmly consider matters, do not find the opposite made impressively manifest! Still, even the Christian has to encounter much that is dis-

turbing, and that would, in the absence of Divine grace, cause distress. The disappointments and annoyances of life are often to him very great; but as a child of God he has an enriching spiritual possession which such things leave undisturbed, and which is enough of itself to make the sweet of life immeasurably exceed its bitter. This possession is the knowledge of the favour of God, with all that accompanies it. He who has this sees and feels that the good of his life is such and so great that its evil ought scarcely to be named.

But very different are the thoughts and the feelings of those who lack the Christian's consolations. At times they find life so full of trying things, and those things so hard to bear, that it is not wonderful if they sometimes rashly affirm that life is evil rather than good, and that there is in it less of pleasure than of pain. Some such, too proud and impious to ask the promised aid of God, have madly sought relief in forbidden ways, thereby making much worse that which was already bad enough.

But there is a sure and excellent way of passing through the complications of this life. It is the way of one who mourns over sin and stands in awe of God, when he calls to mind the fact of which we are now thinking. His sorrow for sin and his awe of God, who so manifestly punishes sin, are accompanied with trust in the blessed Redeemer. He, he knows, has atoned for sin, and made a new life and great enjoyment possible, even on earth. Accepting Christ in all His offices, he finds in the mixed character of life a profitable subject of meditation, since he not only hopes but even knows "that all things work together for good to them that

love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

The Christian finds much comfort in reflecting that he has not been left by God uninstructed as to the life through which he is now passing. Various means have been used by our Heavenly Father to show how we ought to think of this transitory and uncertain mixture, and how we ought to behave in its course. He has sent His Son to show us these things, by His teaching, by His life, by His death, and by His resurrection. The incarnate Son has passed through this life, and found out, by most affecting personal experience, what it really is; and we have in Holy Scripture some of the words which He spoke concerning our present state. His example is before us, and has already had a mighty influence on the thoughts and practices of men. His death shows the evil and the enormity of that sin for which He had made atonement when He expired upon the cross; and His resurrection shows the present privileges of such as trust in Him, and also opens to the view of faith another, a better state of being. Besides, men qualified by special inspiration and appointed by Himself have carried out His gracious plan to completion. They have left on record in the same Holy Scriptures the most stirring and powerful thoughts concerning human life on earth. The case of man in this dark world is thus completely met; and he who consults the Word of God in a proper frame of mind infallibly gathers from its teachings that which enables him to answer with confidence the most important questions that can arise about the present state; and he has this confidence because he knows the authority is Divine.

St. Paul says, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." This passage puts together in the same view, in a striking manner, both the beginning and the end of life. It is important to have right views of these two things; and surely when we know how to think of the beginning and the end of life, we must be in the way for having tolerably correct views of the transition itself; and we may be prepared, by sustained attention to these things, to consider the purpose for which this life is granted.

When we came into this world we brought nothing with us. Some may think it difficult to find aught of practical importance in the saying, "We brought nothing into this world;" but that is a mistake. Indeed, there are in these words lessons of very great value, some of which may in due time appear.

We came into this world. What came? In each case there comes a mere or naked self. This self consists chiefly of an immortal spiritual nature or subsistence, with a subordinate, but for this world necessary dependent material mortal frame. That which comes has certain capacities. Mental capacity is believed to be fixed for this life at birth. One child's capacity of mind is large, while another's is small; and no agency of man can alter this relation; though the mind of large capacity may be more or less neglected, while that of small capacity is used and improved to its utmost extent; the consequence being that the less appears to surpass the greater or to be its equal. In every human being there is also, either developed or undeveloped, a capability of God. This religious power is the greatest

that belongs to human nature, and distinguishes man from the brutes that perish more clearly than anything else. This moral or religious power is never properly exercised until the grace of God has made the penitent believer a new creature in Christ Jesus; but the faculty requisite for the highest developments of the spiritual life belongs to every man, when he comes into this world.

The differences of the dispositions which appear to belong naturally to human beings when they come into this world, may also be noticed. One is mild, placid, and contented; while another is excitable, boisterous, and dissatisfied. A difference like this may be seen in children; and it is perpetuated with modifications through the whole life.

But though we bring nothing into this world, yet we find much when we come. Each comes into circumstances that must have an important influence on the formation and development of character. Let some circumstantial differences between one that comes into the world and another be noticed. One is welcomed, and causes by his coming thrills of intense pleasure, while the advent of another is regarded as an evil. Such a difference in beginnings betokens that some differences will follow. One is born amidst the genuine comforts of Christian life, while another first sees the light amidst squalor and blasphemy. What a difference is this; and with what different feelings must two men, who began life thus differently, look back on their beginnings, if, after many years, they stand side by side in virtue or in honour! Again, one is born to wealth and an honoured name, while another comes to poverty,

and that discredit in the world which poverty is often allowed to occasion. Perhaps this difference of beginnings is more thought of and more deeply felt in the world than any other. These remarks may suffice to clear the way for several distinct thoughts, by which the truth concerning man's brief stay on earth may be in part brought out.

In the lives commenced with the circumstantial and other differences indicated, there commonly come great changes. In the course of years, persons born to poverty become rich, and others born to wealth become poor. Those who came into the world to find but little comfort sometimes succeed in originating comforts for themselves; while others work such follies as naturally blight the promises with which they began. One whose arrival in the world was received with little pleasure makes his presence therein grateful to many, and his departure felt as a loss; while another, whose coming was hailed with delight, makes his being a curse to himself and many more. When changes so great and thorough do not come, there still occurs almost daily that which in some degree diverts the current of life, or modifies existence. The death of a friend or a relative, the loss or the gain of property, a new discovery or invention, and a consequent new branch of industry, or some other such thing, sometimes causes a great change in a man's mind and conduct; and we all are exposed to such things, and have indeed passed through them. How many changes are sometimes seen to have taken place in the circumstances and conditions of a family in one week! How many unexpected turns can an individual sometimes trace, when he looks upon but a few

days of his own career! And who does not know that, generally, when a week's life is calculated beforehand, many things are expected which do not come to pass, and many other things are never thought of which still transpire? Doubtless there are steady men, who pride themselves on their regularity, and unchangingly try to please themselves; but they are not exempt from the operation of this law of change, since even to them there come many circumstances which they have not power to control. Seeing then that changes come to all, we conclude that as the lives of two individuals may differ much at their beginnings, so the several parts of the same life may differ much from one another. "From change to change the creatures run."

But amidst all such changes a man's self is permanent. Let us think of the self as a substance or subsistence. We need not altogether lose sight of the difficulties suggested by such language. But to attempt to remove them is not properly any part of the work at present before us. In this place we proceed on the assumption of the authority of God's Word, in which the absolute inviolability and the permanence of man's personal identity are uniformly taken for granted. If it had not been so, who could have found any meaning or value in the doctrines, the precepts, the promises, or the warnings of Holy Scripture? Regarding the point, then, as thus settled, we at once see that neither the modification of outward actions, nor the changing of relative circumstances, nor the development of native capabilities and powers can involve any change of the substance of that permanent something which a man means when he speaks of himself. A man's surround-

ings, as we have seen, may be thoroughly altered; even his body may become an assemblage of new particles; and his moral attributes also may be changed; but the new creature in Christ is, as to the self, or substantially, the same that he was before his conversion. I do not condemn the use of that hyperbolical language in which a man under the influence of extraordinary thoughts or feelings is sometimes described as a new man; but I ask that its figurativeness may not be forgotten.

A great pain or pleasure, or unusual success or failure, may uncommonly excite and expand the mind, and bring temporary eloquence to a man slow of speech, or vehemence to one commonly sedate; and the thought may arise to some that a person so strangely affected and changed must be, in some mysterious sense, essentially different from what he was before. But such a thought is erroneous, the change being entirely in the accidents, adjuncts, or belongings of the man himself. The conclusion is that as we bring nothing into this world, so we pass through it substantially, essentially the same selves that we were when we began life, being necessarily unable to mix with ourselves anything that we meet with in our earthly course. Material possessions are external to the self, and can influence that self only by means of sensations in the body and ideas in the mind; and the difference between a "rich" man and a "poor" man is very much in their sensations and ideas. This is no denial of the advantage of material competence; but it is an attempt to give a true account of a thing of which many think with sad and lamentable incorrectness.

This inevitable conclusion leads to other reflections. Among them is this, that as a man's self is permanent and unmixed through the course of this life, so the man departs hence at death a mere or naked self. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Each goes away in the completeness of his personality, but leaves behind all the adjuncts or appendages that belonged to him in the course of this transitory life, and enters a state in which earthly distinctions cannot be recognised. When the spirit has thus departed, it is where the rich and the poor, the famous and the unknown, are reduced to the same level of simplicity or nakedness. There the great and decisive question concerning each human being relates to moral character, and therefore to the self. The question of having or not having had great material possessions, or great secular success on earth, will never need to be asked in that state. Every one will feel that, after all the changes through which he has passed since his birth, he is still himself, simply the same that he has been from the first; and the supreme question of personal moral character will force itself upon him with a kind and an amount of energy, at which one otherwise circumstanced might wonder.

How great a change must then have come over those who, on earth, found their only really enjoyable exercises in the contemplation of their secular advantages, and in the use or the abuse of their material possessions. Such a deprivation must be most deeply felt. When the earthly life is recollected and surveyed by such, must it not be seen and felt that the greatest of all the blunders possible at its beginning has been perpetrated?

What a pang must that conviction cause! And since such a one will never be restored to anything like the state and the circumstances from which death removed him, his prospects must be woeful in the extreme. On the other hand, those who, during the earthly life, attend to the interests of their deathless souls according to the will of God, and then leave the world without regret, because blessed with "rejoicing in themselves," and because not dependent for their comforts on the possessions and the circumstances of this world, will have supernal bliss in a state and in employments for which, by Divine grace, they will have been fully prepared. What can it matter to such a person that he has left behind all those earthly possessions and distinctions on which, however high his station in life might be, he never depended for consolation? His heavenly delights will be but a continuance and a completion of such blessedness as all the children of God have even on earth. He will feel that in securing his own personal salvation he has acted the part of a wise man. His case will be in entire contrast to that of one who made this world's concerns the subjects of all his thought and care, and who will now have found that the things on which he depended have perished in the using.

These truths concerning the beginning and the end of life, the intervening period, and what must follow death, are practically disregarded by very many to whom they are well known. Such persons are often found most ready to acknowledge the importance of such incontrovertible and, indeed, almost palpable facts; and yet they are much more concerned about the circum-

stances or accidents of a man than about the man himself. They are in the habit of thinking of other men chiefly as rich or poor, as educated or illiterate, as successful or unsuccessful in the things which belong to the present state; and the same principle rules their thoughts and judgments of themselves. Mighty to such a man is the thought, that he was born of rich or honoured parents, that he can call a certain amount of this world's good his own, or that he has attained a certain position in this life; while the influence upon him of the recollection that he has an immortal spirit, and has interests which cannot be gained either by depending on the fame or the goodness of others, or by his own worldly success, is so small that it scarcely deserves to be named. Indeed, the habit of such men appears to be, to strive to banish such thoughts from their minds. In regard both to themselves and to others, they forget the man himself, and think of his adjuncts or surroundings. They fill their vision with that which must shortly come to an end, and which may cease very soon; and they are content to leave unconsidered that which will certainly endure for ever. This is like preferring a casket to a gem which it holds, or the transient lightning-flash of night to the lasting brightness of day. Yet who could with intelligence actually have such a preference as to the things of the body or the market? And where can we find the men who, even when guilty, are willing to acknowledge, either to others or to themselves, that they actually commit the blunder which is here condemned? Indeed, some appear to run so eagerly after the things of this life, as never to have allowed themselves time or oppor-

tunity properly to think of the relation¹ of that which now is to that which will be after death. How profitable would it be for any such man to be brought to thoughtfulness about these things, and for him then carefully to consider what any Christian could tell and urge on his attention by strong reasons.

And what could the Christian tell, and how does he think of this common blunder? He regards it as a carnal way of judging, which Christianity leads men both theoretically and practically to renounce, according to these words of St. Paul, "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore, if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." This apostolic way of estimating men appears to proceed on the principles which I have laboured thus far to elucidate, concerning man himself with his distinguishing moral character, as immeasurably exceeding in value any circumstances or accidents possible in this world; and this apostolic estimation is characteristically Christian, and can be shown to be most rational and wise. But that carnal estimation which I now condemn, is an irrational and foolish thing. It is plain that those who do this thing have allowed their thoughts and judgments of men to be enthralled to those things which are ever changing, and cannot long endure; and this bondage causes misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and many evils of other sorts. Is it not strange that persons of intelligence can proceed on this erroneous principle, and not be shocked? And is it not manifest

that professors of Christianity discredit their religion, in proportion as they allow themselves to think and speak after this fashion? This is a case in which a word is not sufficient even to the wise, so great and insidious is the influence of the world. We certainly see here a subject on which many words and much counsel are needed.

There is, then, a momentous practical meaning in the words, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." This meaning ought not to be overlooked. Every one ought to see here what is of great practical importance to himself; since he is and ever must be distinct from all the things and from all the other persons of this and of all other worlds. Such is the Divine appointment as to his personality. How manifest it therefore is, that his wisdom in regard to himself must consist in his being in a proper personal state in relation both to God and to his fellow-creatures. Since each of his fellow-men is, as to his personality, just like himself, his chief concern for others ought to be to help them to promote their true personal good; circumstantial advantages being regarded as quite secondary, though possibly helpful in the gaining of the purpose of life. Let me therefore try to answer two questions. How may a person in this transitory life attain the proper state? and how may one assist others to do the same?

The only known way in which the proper personal state can be attained is the Christian way, the way of "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." In repentance and faith, a person comes to God's own mind on the subject of personal religion.

He renounces improper and delusive objects of confidence. He fulfils conditions on which the necessary change of moral character is, not arbitrarily, but naturally appointed by God to depend. It is in perfect harmony with the human constitution, that a man is thus treated by God according to his faith. And what are repentance and faith? In repentance towards God, a person intelligently and voluntarily complies with the conviction of sin and of want which has been already wrought within him by the Holy Ghost, and turns at God's command from all known evil; and in faith, he exercises "a sure trust and confidence that Jesus died for his sins, that He loved him, and gave Himself for him." In thus repenting and believing, man, naturally "without strength," is graciously but mysteriously empowered by the Holy Spirit for the moral action which God requires. One who thus repents and believes is accepted by God on the ground of the atonement. The great King, against whom his sins were done, has now pardoned those sins, which need not be remembered against him again for ever; and he has also been renewed in heart by the gracious and wonderful agency of the Holy Ghost. One thus justified and regenerated stands in the proper relations to God, who has given to him the spirit of adoption, that enables him to cry, "Abba, Father." Being thus related to God, he must have the approval of his own conscience in regard to the law of God, of which that love which he feels and shows is "the fulfilling"; and he strives not without success "to have a conscience void of offence" towards men. All this naturally follows his great change. Many have in this Christian

way been brought to the proper personal state, and have lived and died in gratitude to God for the knowledge of His will. If a man needs this great change or conversion, and must have it between his coming into the world and his departure out of it, or else fail to accomplish the purpose of his being, how momentous is the Scripture doctrine concerning the permanent and inviolable self; and how monstrous is the mistake of those who forget their immortal spirits, and attend exclusively to the perishing affairs of this world!

How may one who has attained the proper personal state assist others in doing the same? In answer to this question, it is well to say that the Christian has in this respect great advantage, because of the clearness and the depth of his conviction of the truth already set forth concerning personal interests as distinguished from adjuncts. When a man knows Christ as his own Saviour, he has, or surely ought to have entirely given up the worldly way of looking at outward things, as we have already seen; and while he is wishful to promote the material comforts of men, he feels that, as "the body is more than raiment," so the spirit is more than the body and all that belongs to this fleeting state. In accordance with his conditions he seeks to do good to men by using the means best adapted to that end, and best adapted also to his own circumstances, character, and tastes; and both his personal character and his relation to God warrant the belief that his search will not be permitted to be in vain. In coming to his present spiritual condition, he has passed through experiences which he knows every unregenerated man

needs. To those to whom he has access he can tell, with confidence, of what he has felt and seen. Thus he can use an instrument which must operate in many cases with great power; while, meeting in his Christian life the conditions on which the promise of Divine guidance is fulfilled, he confidently expects to be enabled to do good to men.

And how may such good be done? By the tongue, by the pen, and by the life. Statesmen and lecturers, as well as preachers, may, if they so desire, say to such as listen things that help to the knowledge of Christ and His salvation; and innumerable conversations are doubtless daily held by which inquirers are led to see how the end of life may be accomplished by yielding to the requirements of God. As to personal religion, its necessity, and the way to get it, multitudes have been brought to clear views and deep convictions, by means of books written with the design to glorify God, and sent forth with many prayers for His blessing; and much of this kind is, we doubt not, going on at the present day. And what is more powerful for good than a holy life? From it observers may learn how to use this world without abusing it, and how to make this transient life the season of perfect preparation for a glorious eternal future.

How great is the honour of testifying for God, and bringing Him glory in any of these ways; and how great is the pleasure of feeling that you are doing something promotive of the everlasting advantage of a fellow-man! He who thus benefits a child of man does good to one whom he may meet, a hundred ages hence, in another sphere, where some grand return may


possibly be made for the good conferred. How different, in that inconceivably distant age, will be the retrospects of two men, one of whom devoted his earthly life exclusively to the affairs of time, while the other was ever serving the Lord with a steady eye to "the recompense of the reward," discharging all his duties in a Christian way! These reflections may lead us to see how important to men, as related to one another, is the practical doctrine shown to be contained in the words, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

But there may be raised an objection to which it will be well to devote a few concluding words. Does any one object that he considers the representation here made open to the charge of selfishness, as tending to cause those who should practically adopt it, to attend both first and chiefly to themselves? To such a thought the answer is easy, and can be brief. If the course of action described had in it the evil element of selfishness, then God would have enjoined evil upon us in His Holy Word, in which He commands us to "seek *first* the Kingdom of God and His righteousness"; but that God has enjoined selfishness or any other evil, is what no one who knows the truth concerning the Divine Nature, as revealed in Scripture, can believe. But what has been described is not a selfish way of acting, as can be proved in another way; for one who does what has been recommended and shown to be required of us, gains his own real interest on condition of giving up his own will, and submitting to God; which, certainly, is not done on the principle of selfishness. And he who attends to his own interests, "seeking *first* the kingdom

of God and His righteousness," is bound by the principles of his religion to be diligent in business, while he is fervent in spirit and serves the Lord, to provide for those of his own household, and to do good to all men so far as he can. And it is a fact, that those who have most extensively benefited their fellow-men, have been persons that acted, in regard to themselves, most consistently with the principle to which this objection has been raised. In conclusion, let us apply to the whole subject these words of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if you do them."



II.—THE GREAT PURPOSE.

E have already seen that every human being comes into this world a mere or naked self, and goes away in equal simplicity, though with a difference. At birth the child is potentially all that the adult becomes actually during the probationary life; and when this period ends, the character, whether evil or good, is fixed for ever. In the character of each individual will then be proved and sustained the full commingled results of his own action, of the influence of men and things, and of gracious Divine impressions, whether cherished or stifled.

According to the uniform assumption of Holy Scripture, every human being will be for ever separate and distinct from all the rest. Consequently there can be in each case an eternal fulfilling of the Divine word of promise or of threatening which applies. Promised good will come to those who will have accomplished the purpose of earthly life, and so fulfilled the conditions on which such good is appointed to depend; and threatened evil must, for like reasons, overtake such as will have failed. How pertinent, therefore, to us, who have not yet either ultimately failed or ultimately succeeded, is the discussion of

The Purpose of This Transitory Life,
to which we now turn our attention.

That there is a Divine purpose as to human life on

earth must be admitted at once by all who believe in the intelligence or wisdom of God. Wisdom or intelligence implies design in regard to that which the wise or intelligent being does. When the Lord created the human race, He knew and considered, so to speak, what He was about and what would follow ; and the perfectness or absoluteness of His wisdom urges to the conviction that He must have an all-reaching purpose, which is but modified by its adaptation to the cases of different individuals. Each of the human race is ever before the mind of the Infinite ; and must He not have a desire and a design concerning each ? When, in taking this view, we think also how many human beings are at present on the earth, how many have died since the beginning, and how many may yet be born, the thought may be promotive of proper reverence for Him in whom all live, and move, and have their being. What a sublime mystery to us is He the necessity of whose intelligence it is, thus to know each of His human creatures at the same time ; and how wonderful a thing it is, that a fallen creature may be enabled and permitted to call that Being his Father and his Friend !

Some facts may be named that ought to lead men to study the purpose of the present life ; and in this study there must be constant reference to God and His will.

It is needful to know what this purpose is. However conscientious a man destitute of this knowledge might be, how could he have comfort in thinking of his life ? He might have an opinion as firm as opinions often are, as to the purpose of life ; but what would his opinion be but the unproved and therefore unreliable

notion of a creature? And so long as he had nothing more certain than that, how could he be at ease, even if he should reach in life his own standard of excellence? He would be able to get to this point, that he might be accomplishing the purpose; but he could not arrive at the state of mind properly called conviction or assurance; whereas a man who knows and does not merely guess the purpose of life, is able, when he surveys his own course, and compares it with the known purpose, to conclude, either that he is accomplishing that purpose, or that he is not so doing; and it is evident that the one conclusion must bring comfort, while the other must plainly show what absent thing is essential to comfort. Thus appears the advantage of this knowledge.

In this matter that which is needful is also possible. There is among men an authoritative statement on the subject. It is in a Book which adds to the teachings of nature all that Infinite Wisdom has deemed it well to let men know on earth of the things of which it treats. The evidences on which the Bible is received as the Word of God are such that it is read with the conviction, "Thus saith the Lord;" and surely a Book that has come from God to man for his guidance, must tell the creature the Creator's will and design concerning himself. How otherwise could it be an authoritative guide, or an adequate revelation? And though much that man would like to know on many subjects is not found in the Bible, yet it does confessedly contain all that is needful for the end for which it has been given. It is therefore possible for man to know the purpose of his present existence; and in this possibility there is

one of the innumerable striking proofs of God's goodness to the human race.

Moreover, in this matter that which is needful and possible is also incumbent on the children of men. It is our duty to know what is the purpose of this life. God who has formed the purpose demands that it be accomplished; but since we cannot accomplish it as intelligent beings without antecedent knowledge of the way to do so, His demand that it be accomplished includes the demand that we have this knowledge; and in this is included also the demand that, if we be ignorant, we use the means to acquire the information needed. Thus we are led to see the necessity of reading the Scriptures, the assumed and confessed authority on the subject. This view of the thing may affect the interest felt in the subject of the present meditation; for surely when we come to see that a needful and possible thing is also enjoined upon us by God, we have before us a fact that may naturally awaken the wish at once to do what God so plainly and so reasonably requires; and when this wish exists as to any particular thing, there is readiness to think of that thing, and to accept an attempt to convey helpful relative suggestions.

Let me, therefore, point out certain things that must be true concerning the purpose of this life, and then apply them as tests to some of the things which men appear to pursue as their chief ends in life. This will prepare us to consider what Holy Scripture lays down as the truth in regard to the whole matter.

First: The purpose of this transitory life must be something the accomplishing of which is fairly and

properly expected of every human being. This appears to be the conclusion at which we naturally arrive, when we assume, on the authority of Holy Scripture, the essential sameness of universal human nature. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." All men have sprung from one stock; and there are in every one those three parts which St. Paul calls body, soul, and spirit. Every human body is of the dust of the earth, and has been depraved by sin; though some are instruments of sin in a more extensive degree than others. Every human being has the same essential faculties of moral mind, namely, intellect, sensibility, and will; though individuals differ much in their capacities and developments. And every one is capable of God, and can therefore be religious; though some have become so degraded, that they can bow down in worship to the works of their own hands, and the powers of others are for a time suspended by disease. Now, why has the same nature been given to every human being, if not in order that every one may answer the same grand end or purpose which naturally applies to every case? This conclusion does not seem to be at all invalidated by differences found between the capacities and developments of one and of another, since such differences are accidental and not of the essence of human nature. But if the purpose of human life is thus shown to be something the accomplishing of which is properly required of every human being, we have here a test the application of which must clearly condemn many of the practices of men.

Secondly : The purpose of this transitory life must

be something the accomplishing of which prepares man for happy existence after death. This clearly follows, when we acknowledge that Almighty God must, on account of the perfection of His goodness, desire the happiness of His creatures, and that this life is introductory and preparatory to the state entered at death. It seems impossible for any one to doubt that such is God's desire; and that this is an introductory and preparatory life, is not only a thing reasonable in itself, but is also a doctrine clearly and amply declared in Holy Scripture. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." A thing is good or evil as it is after the Spirit or after the flesh; and everything good or evil in this life has practical relation to the future state, since it contributes something to the character according to which the person who does it will there be treated, and has also some influence on fellow-immortals, with reference to whom every one is responsible to God. In other words, whatever we may be doing for ourselves or for others, we are sowing things which we must at last reap; than which nothing is clearer on the face of the Word of God; and if we do not sow the good of doing the proper work of this life, we cannot reap the good of having accomplished its purpose; whereas when the proper work has been done, the purpose must necessarily have been accomplished. Wherefore, a question which must be noticed about the pursuits of men is this, Do they prepare for the happiness of the future state? Here, then, is

another test, the application of which must condemn many things which some very highly value, and on which they are content to spend their lives.

Thirdly : The purpose of this transitory life must be something the accomplishing of which yields man present satisfaction. This follows if we acknowledge that the wisdom of God is perfect. Man's capability of God, already noticed, implies a susceptibility of Divine impressions. Why has this susceptibility been given by the Creator, if such impressions were not intended to follow? What God has done in this respect must have been done in absolute wisdom; there cannot be here any waste of means; and when Divine impressions are made on the human mind, they must agree with facts. Accordingly, when a man knows that he is doing that by which the purpose of his life is sure to be accomplished, what can his impression be but one of satisfaction? For this there is abundant reason in the facts of the case, and in the revealed feeling of the Divine mind. Indeed, is it not, in such a case, God's own feeling that is conveyed to the man? We read of Enoch that "before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God;" and how could he have it but in the way now suggested? On the other hand, when the purpose is not known to be likely to be accomplished, but there is reason to fear that it is failing, what can the consequent impression be but one of dissatisfaction? The sufficient reason for this also is in the facts of the case. Have we not here an admirable part of the discipline through which God has appointed man to pass in this world? "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things;" and through the

human heart or conscience He makes known His mind and feeling to men. In this way men are convinced of sin and blessed with the consolations of the Christian life; and is it not inconceivable that He in whose hands are the minds of all, and who treats each in his individual capacity, can permit one to be satisfied the purpose of whose life is failing, or another to be unsatisfied who is daily answering his appointed end? Thus is brought out a third test, the application of which must condemn things to which many devote themselves with all their powers.

Many and various are the things which men practically esteem as the purposes of this life and pursue accordingly, which yet cannot bear the application of these tests. Let a few such things be briefly noticed.

Worldly Pleasure pursued as the end of life does not bear these tests. It would seem that to some of the ardent lovers of worldly pleasure, animal gratification is the great end of all things. They appear to talk and think, and dream chiefly of that which affects the senses, also labouring hard to get it. Others are vain, and find most delight in show, and therefore deck themselves in such apparel as must gain applause, or at least attention. Others vary the thing, and find most enjoyment in display of other kinds, or in possessions. And others rejoice most in popular amusements, and in going hither and thither, to see and to be seen. How do such ways of spending life appear when the tests are applied?

It is not possible for all at one time to find in worldly pursuits what is worthy of the name of pleasure. Poverty and sickness, physical feebleness, and certain

peculiarities of mind, make such things impossible to thousands. Many a man is so poor and so circumstanced in other respects, that his hours are almost exclusively claimed by his workshop where he spends his energies, and his couch where he recruits them; some are periodically prestrated by diseases, which make them incapable of enjoying life in the ordinary sense of these words; and some are so much more vigorous in mind than in body, that they utterly disrelish merely sensuous pursuits, though they may seek sinful pleasure in voluptuous exercises of mind. Such facts unanswerably prove that it is not possible for all to have worldly pleasure, and that worldly pleasure cannot be the end of life.

Nor can the pursuit of worldly pleasure prepare for happiness after death. Death involves such a change of circumstances, that it renders impossible many of those earthly practices in which some indulge for the pleasure they afford. Most significant in regard to many such things are the words of the Apostle Paul, "Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats; but God shall destroy both it and them." What must be the condition then of a soul sensualised on earth? Among the elements of that condition we may see deprivation, pain, and despair. All earthly good will have been lost; this fact must cause the most painful feelings; and the knowledge of the impossibility of future restoration to anything like the condition left at death must cause despair of the blackest kind. Then a life devoted to earthly pleasures prepares not for happiness but for misery after death, and the proper end cannot be accomplished by such a course.

Such things pursued as the end of life are equally condemned by the remaining test ; for it is abundantly manifest that the pursuit of worldly pleasures does not yield present satisfaction. This failure is reasonable, because such things are very far below the dignity and the capacity of human nature, and are not at all adapted to meet its greatest wants. Many that have done their best to find satisfaction in them, have had to confess that they are disappointing and vexatious, and that nothing that is purely of this world can possibly satisfy the mind of man. A most remarkable statement, and a significantly frank confession on this subject, made by an uncommonly great and successful man of the world, may be seen in the second chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes ; and let smaller and less gifted men give heed with docility to the results of his experience, that they may be led to see and feel that not in worldly pleasures is the purpose of the present life. How great a change would quickly appear among men, if the thorough conviction of this were suddenly made universal ! May the present effort help to spread such a conviction !

Learning pursued as the end of life does not bear these tests. There are men who devote themselves to employments supposed to be purely intellectual, and who regard that which does not help on such things as not worthy of their lives ; and there are others who seem to think education the best of all needful and possible things, and to consider that when it is given to children, they receive all that is absolutely required in the way of means for the accomplishing of life's great end. Do not such practically find or seek the purpose

of life in mental exercises and culture and that for which they prepare? Then let us again carefully apply our tests.

This estimation of learning or education is condemned on the ground that neither learning nor education is possible to all. Some are now too old, and some are too unfavourably circumstanced in other respects ever to be educated. In some there is found what amounts almost to a physical impossibility of education, to say nothing of such learning as might become to them a means of livelihood. Yet such cases must be included in the all-reaching Divine purpose as to this life. Then who that is wise can accept that as the purpose of his life which is simply impossible to thousands of fellow-creatures who have the same nature with himself?

This estimation of learning or education is condemned also on the ground that intellectual culture and exercises cannot prepare for the happiness of heaven. The intellect will have play in heaven; but the grand primary fitness for that state is not intellectual but moral; and moral character does not depend on that mental development of which I now speak. Think of the probable knowledge of Satan. Are not all the languages of men, all the facts and discoveries of human science, and many other things of which men have neither heard nor dreamed, altogether plain to him, though he is utterly evil, and unfit for the life of heaven? When men have left this world, they are "as the angels," happy or miserable spirits; and what must be the state after death of that human sinner who on earth spent all his time and all his power over intellectual pursuits, to the neglect of his spiritual part and

its great wants? Must he not deeply feel that he has ruinously given to the less the attention necessary for the greater? Must not this feeling cause great pain? And is not this reasoning quite conclusive in condemnation of the way of living now under notice?

The application of the third test must deepen this impression; for mere mental cultivation leaves man still unsatisfied. There are in man wants which cannot be removed in this way, wants which arise from his spirituality and consequent moralness of nature and capability of God. This is proved by many facts; for biography tells of men in whom there were the greatest power and the highest attainments of mind, together with spiritual emptiness of the most fearful degree; and would it be impossible to find living examples of the same? How many men have in this respect resembled the prodigal son, of whom our Lord says, that "when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land; and he began to be in want." The amplest mental resources cannot give spiritual satisfaction to man. Think again also of Satan, whose uncommon knowledge and mental activity do not prevent his being wretched; and let the unspiritual and unholy scholar consider how it is that he is not satisfied by things of the same kind, which exist in him on a smaller scale. These tests have been applied for the condemnation not of learning but of one of its abuses; and may this word be, when it comes to the thoughtful youth, sufficient for its purpose.

Wealth pursued as the purpose of life does not bear these tests. When we consider the ways in which many contrive and toil and save, in order that they may

become rich, we cannot easily avoid the conviction, that they practically regard this as all they need live for. At this we do not wonder, when we reflect on the known way in which riches may contribute to personal and relative comforts.

But our first test condemns also this way of living, since it is not possible for all to be rich. At least there seems never to have been a time when all were rich; and where is the probability that such a time is coming near? It appears to be natural for wealth to accumulate in certain circumstances; and is it not natural also for some to be poor? Yet the purpose of life applies to the poor as well as the rich; and large would be the number of those who must fail, if only wealthy persons could answer the proper end.

The pursuit of wealth as the end of life is condemned also because riches cannot prepare for happiness after death? If, in a sense, riches make men happy on earth, the happiness quite depends on possession and use; but after death both use and possession have ceased. "It is certain that we can carry nothing out" of this world. In one of the psalms we read of the rich man, that "when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him." Since death lands rich and poor in a state where they are on the same level of personal simplicity, certain feelings and actions, common and proper between poor and rich on earth, will then be utterly improper, if at all possible, between the same individuals. Those who on earth cared for nothing but money will feel most acutely the great change brought upon them; and those who had discomfort on earth through want of money may feel

that their temporary hardship promoted a useful discipline, and has become matter for gratitude to God. But happiness after death depends on conditions and elements of character, which cannot arise from the possession and influence of riches, but are rather in danger of being precluded thereby. The Lord's teaching is, that a rich man enters heaven with great difficulty; and biography supplies many facts by which this teaching appears to be corroborated. There seems therefore, to be great necessity for this apostolic counsel, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Those who follow this counsel do not pursue wealth as the end of life. They are morally incapable of such error.

Nor do riches yield that present satisfaction which man's nature requires. A man who has acquired a certain amount of this world's good may be satisfied in the sense, that he is content to stop and to strive no more; but in the spiritual sense of satisfaction there can be no such thing from money, or what it can procure. The reason for this, also, is plain. Spiritual satisfaction comes by gracious Divine operation, by means of truth, when there is consent thereto; but what connection or relation can there be between inward spiritual satisfaction and the outward possession of wealth and what wealth can bring? Who can ever

believe that money can take the place and do the work of Divine truth cordially received? The natures of the two things are quite different, and cannot even be compared, but must stand in entire contrast. Who does not see that the more money a man has, the more he is in danger of being self-condemned for his disregard of the protest of an enlightened mind? That mind tells him that he was made for something higher than the possession and the use of the good things of this world. When God is practically forgotten, and the regard which He ought to have is given to gold, because it is next to Him in power, working marvels in the way of outward material comforts, a clear demand of conscience is neglected, and the man cannot be satisfied. Indeed he may be filled with remorse because God makes Himself heard. And how great must be the heart-emptiness of those who have only earthly things to depend on for comfort in sickness, in sorrow, and in death! Then who that is wise can allow himself to be carried away by that which is thus so clearly and fully condemned?

Power pursued as the end of life does not bear these tests. Most adults may have power in some way, small or large. One man aims at being a chief ruler in Church or State; while another thinks he will be satisfied if he can govern, or be powerful in some less considerable way. It appears that God has, for wise ends, made natural to some minds a thirst for great power; and the wisdom of the arrangement is shown in the good which it has occasioned in States, in Churches, in letters, in commerce, and in common life; though it has, like other good and wise things, been seriously

abused; and when the acquisition of power is practically made the end of life, a thing is done which the application of our tests must condemn. It is not possible for all on earth to have anything worthy of the name of power. Many never attain the age or the development indispensable to the exercise of conscious power; and others are constitutionally infirm and dependent, and therefore unfit to rule. Yet the Divine purpose of life must apply to such; and perhaps some such are more likely than men of the other class to accomplish the true end. Oh, how numerous must the failures be, if power were essential to the accomplishing of the purpose!

The pursuit of power as the end of life is condemned also by the second test; for how can earthly power prepare for the peculiar happiness of heaven? What reason have we to think that the powerful ones of the earth will rule fellow-creatures also after death? May they not possibly in some cases be surpassed by others through changes naturally consequent on death itself? This possibility ought to have importance with those who need suggestions on the subject. But, even if power acquired on earth were to be continued, could it at all promote fitness for the peculiar good of the heavenly state? Surely qualification for the enjoyments there prepared must depend on something very different, since that state differs entirely from this in those very respects which the question now before us involves. I refer to *régime*. Besides, in this world men judge after the outward appearance, and their judgments are often erroneous enough; but in that world God's own true judgment will be made known to

men ; and in the estimation both of God and of creatures personal character will be all. Now, does the possession or the pursuit of power help men on earth to attain that character which the Lord Jesus thus describes, " Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven " ? Does it not much more frequently promote pride and forgetfulness of God ? That which thus fails to bear the test and works such mischief cannot be to any man the purpose of his life.

The third test will bring us to the same conclusion ; for the wielding of power does not give man satisfaction by the supplying of his wants. One who has attained a dazzling elevation among men, may to a large extent forget what he is, and what he is intended for, and may constantly neglect properly to consider such things ; but still he must as a man have certain wants, which, his feelings tell him, are not met by the things of earth. Even in such a man there is a conscience which must at times make itself heard for God, testifying that the unmet demands of a powerful but unregenerate worldly man are, because of his immortality and his capability of God, far greater than all the wants he has already satisfied by what he has attained. As to this point, the lives of some great men are full of instruction.

Thus the tests which were evolved from acknowledged principles, have plainly condemned certain things to which some deliberately give up their lives. Such things are not properly pursued as the purpose of this transitory life. But it may afterwards appear that some of them can, when properly subordinated, be

so pursued as to be among the means by which the true purpose can be accomplished. What, then, is the true purpose? It remains that I answer this question from Holy Scripture, and show how completely the doctrine there taught bears the tests by which other things are condemned.

From the Bible we learn that the purpose of man's existence, and therefore of this transitory life, is *to promote the glory of God*. "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to Whom be glory for ever." "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Man proceeds, in promoting the glory of God, in the way of free moral action. This is according to the principles of his nature. The Creator requires of the human creature that He be thought of, loved, and obeyed, and that all affairs be attended to with reference and in submission to His will. When this service is rendered, Jehovah's greatness and authority are acknowledged in thought and in practice, and the creature does not claim the honour of his own being and power and action, but gladly yields it up to God. And why does this glorify God? Just because it is a practical acknowledgment of His attributes and claims. Men are honoured when they rule their fellow-men. It is an honour to sit on a throne, or to have some inferior governmental power; and God enjoins upon us reverence for "the powers that be." It is also an honour to have and to exercise regal power over the minds and the lives of men, by means of new thoughts and convictions. Which of these two honours is the greater? For an answer compare the influence of

Aristotle and that of his pupil Alexander the Great. "While the earth," says Dr. Harris, "was resounding with Alexander's exploits, Aristotle his tutor was achieving the mightier conquest of the human mind. The Macedonian empire was soon dismembered and extinct; but the mental empire of the philosopher continued vigorous and entire for more than two thousand years, moulding opinions, affecting creeds, and indirectly guiding the popular intellect; nor is it anything like destroyed yet."—"*Man Primeval*," p. 252.

God has a natural kingdom, which "ruleth over all;" but there is a power over men which He has only when they take Him at His word, and consent to be ruled thereby in thought and deed. This consent includes entire submission to His known will; and the language of one who so consents is, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory;" and the words express the feeling that is most natural. By this constant self-renouncing obedience man promotes the glory of God, and accomplishes the purpose of his own existence, and therefore of this transitory life. This prepares for the application of the tests, which must now be made.

First: It is possible for all thus to glorify God. They who have and consider the Gospel see very clearly how this is to be done; those to whom the Gospel has not come are not left utterly without light, God having in some degree revealed His will to them; and when a man lives fully up to the light he has, whether it be the great light of the Gospel or the little light of nature, God accepts that man as one who

answers the purpose of his being. The reason is, that he submits to Almighty God, as far as he knows His will. "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." Surely on this principle it is possible for God to be glorified by a surrender, in all cases equally complete, by the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the strong and the weak; by children who can know but very little of the will of God; and by slaves whom men despise. How helpful it is in thinking of human life, to get hold of a principle of such manifestly universal application! Indeed, here is in fact the essence of all personal religion. All sin is selfishness; and all holiness depends on full and hearty self-renouncing submission to God. In this simple principle, or rather in its simplicity, we see the reason why the dullest or youngest person that has the power at all to apprehend the meaning of a proposition, is capable of consciously answering that purpose of life which includes or requires a change of heart. "He that believeth shall be saved;" and who is not able to believe? Thus the doctrine of Holy Scripture, on the subject now before us, is shown to be admirable by the application of our first test.

Secondly: One who is now living for the glory of God in the way described is prepared for happiness after death. He has the favour of God, on the possession of which the happiness of heaven must depend. He has come into agreement with the mind of God; and now his distinguishing peculiarity is neither in his body, nor in his possessions, nor in his circumstances,

but in his self; and it is there because all his faculties and powers have begun to be exercised according to the fact that he has chosen that which pleases God. In this respect he is a new creature in Christ, though in reference to many things he may be just what he was before. This applies to one who lives in full Gospel light. Of all things that now occupy his mind he naturally thinks with reference to God and to the statement of His will contained in Holy Writ; his feelings correspond with his thoughts, being guided thereby; and both are acceptable to his heavenly Father, because they result from the coincidence of the two wills, God's and his.

What is thus realised is capable of being continued for ever, since immortal man must choose, and think, and feel as long as he exists. As the choice of the sainted Christian will please God for ever, being coincident with His own, his thoughts and feelings also will have Divine approval; and thus heaven will be heaven to all the parts of the sainted nature. And let it be added, that since this life is certainly introductory to something higher and more glorious, the spiritual good obtained by the Christian on earth will be not only retained for ever, but also improved. But whatever heights may be attained in knowledge or in bliss, the principle on which the glory of God is promoted now will still obtain, and will rule the whole man and all his actions. That is to say, there will be constant and blissful submission to the will of God; and every one of that "great multitude which no man can number" will feel, while he promptly and gladly does the Master's will, that he learned and practised the

principle of the heavenly life before he left the earth. Thus instructive is the application of our second test to the purpose of life revealed in Holy Scripture.

Thirdly: One who is thus prepared for the future life and its happiness has present satisfaction. He is very far from the stage of those who know the purpose of life, and desire or hope at some day to gain it; he is also far from the stage of such as know the purpose, desire to gain it, and feebly and changefully try to do so; for he has now in a significant sense in fact accomplished it. Whether he is young or old, he can say, "I have already come off victorious in the great fight with evil; and I am confident that if I be called this day into the world of destiny, I shall enter on the happiness of heaven, for which I am already, by Divine grace, prepared." One who has come thus far has present satisfaction, because he knows that God is pleased with him, because he feels that his life has been a success, and because he has no dreadful forebodings as to what will come to him at death. He has that which Jesus promised under the name of *rest*. He is not now yearning for the living God; but this promise of the Lord Jesus has been fulfilled to him, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him;" and he can therefore say with the prophet, "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." No one that understands and considers the question, can wonder that Holy Scripture represents the condition of such a man as being distinguishingly happy. Thus the application of the third test is borne by the purpose of life declared in

the Bible; and this application indicates some of the distinctive privileges of the children of God.

One conclusion to which we are thus brought is, that great thankfulness is due from us, because we have not been left in the dark as to the end for which we now live. How many who have knowledge of the truth concerning this matter fail duly to apply it, and are still far too much influenced by the things which belong to this perishing world! Who can say this has not been his own case? Happy would be the man who could so say, since he would use this world without abusing it, and employ its affairs for the end which God designs.

With a few remarks on this point I may fitly conclude this portion of the present task. Among the means of gaining the real end of life may be many secular things. Eating and drinking, properly regulated, keep a man alive, and so in their way, enable him longer and more effectually to glorify God on earth. The cultivation of his mind may enable a person to see better what he is fit for, and to accomplish better what he undertakes; and it may therefore enable him to make such determinations and to carry out such plans as must add to the amount of the honour which he brings to his heavenly Father. Wealth obtained by lawful and holy means may be helpful to the same end, when devoted to the work for which God evidently requires it. And power Christianly acquired and used may be made highly subservient to efforts for the glory of God. When a man whom God has permitted to attain a great elevation, proceeds in all things according to Christian convictions, striving to make men bene-

ficially feel the power of his holy religion, the greater is his social, civic, or political power, the more extensive must be his influence for good. We see, then, that there is a right and safe way in which men may pursue those secular things to which they are naturally inclined. 'It is the way of doing all things to the glory of God, the Christian way. Let a man aim at that which he knows it is both lawful and expedient to acquire or to do, and to which he is constitutionally urged, and let him aim at it not as the end of his life, but as one of the means of answering the true end, and God will certainly bless him, and in some way grant success. O that this were duly understood by all! Then would men give great heed to the elevating and ennobling doctrine which St. Paul thus sets forth: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."



III.—THE GREAT SUCCESS.

WE have considered at some length man's brief sojourn on earth, and its end or purpose, and are now prepared to dwell, in further prosecution of our theme, on

The Accomplishing of the Purpose of This Transitory Life.

This is a matter which imperatively demands the attention of all. No one can say it belongs to his neighbour rather than to himself. If that view of the purpose of life which has already been presented is correct, every one ought to be self-prompted to consider the conditions, the means, and the process of its fulfilment.

Ere long, my brethren, we shall look back upon our present life as a thing completely and for ever past. It may do us good to imagine how we might have to survey it, if we should leave it in our present states; and assistance in considering this point may be found in the thoughts and feelings naturally occasioned by contemplating that portion of our career through which we have already run. We stand not yet upon anything like the intellectual and moral heights of the eternal state; but we are able to look back into a past, which, though short, is of great importance to us. Does the retrospect bring pleasure or pain? A true reply to this inquiry must also answer, or at least show the

way to answer, this other question, Am I accomplishing the purpose for which I now live? The reason why the answers to these two questions are much the same, is to be found in the preceding lectures.

Can we find an example that will help us in the study of this topic? I believe we can. But when we consider what we want in the way of an example, a difficulty is suggested by the question, To what quarter shall I look? Mr. Cecil says, "Every man has his favourite notions; and, therefore, no one is a proper standard. The perfect standard is only to be found in Scripture.....I have found great benefit in being sickened and disgusted with the false standards of men. I turn with stronger convictions to the perfect standards of God's Word." This view may properly guide us in the present inquiry. Let us look into the New Testament for the case of a sinner saved by grace, who by God's help fully accomplished the purpose. No other example is so fully set forth in the New Testament as that of St. Paul. To him, therefore, we will look for instruction and comfort. But let it not be forgotten that success in the work of which I speak depends on Divine help.

Perhaps all that is distinctive in St. Paul's case is characteristically expressed or fully implied in these words, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." The present subject cannot be studied under better guidance than that which these words provide. Taken by themselves, they are strikingly significant as to this subject; and the context is believed to warrant rather than to condemn that use to which they are to be turned in this lecture,

though it is neither denied nor questioned that a very different use of them is also proper.

Let us think of the man by whom they were written, observing of him that he was now an old man. How short, how uncertain, how changeful, how momentous would life seem to be when surveyed from his point of view. How different must his thoughts then be from those he had once had. How pleasant to an old man must it be to know that he has not wasted his life, but has accomplished that for which he was sent into the world. How great is the advantage to a young man when he has such a one for his father or his friend. How profitable to the young is free communication with old persons wise and good. Such an old man was St. Paul; and though the young often find it difficult to enter into full sympathy with the aged, yet his case may become highly instructive to the youngest person to whom these thoughts will ever find their way. Indeed, there is found in his character and life an example for all.

The faculties of this old man were still vigorous when he wrote the words of which I speak. For proofs of this we need not go beyond the letter in which these words occur—the second to Timothy. Considered as a human production, it would show that he was a sober, judicious, clear-headed counsellor; that he was too wise, and had had too much experience, to be carried away by imaginings or trifles; and that he was very far from being capable of enthusiastically defending an irrational system; so that under this aspect the epistle would come to us with great force. But we are not at liberty to regard it as a merely human pro-

duction, for St. Paul was divinely inspired to declare God's will, and what he says is properly regarded as God's saying to us on the subject of which he treats. How influential ought that to be which comes to us with so much certainty. It ought mightily to affect our minds, and to show great results in our lives, as there is known to be perfect safety in putting ourselves fully under its direction.

The Apostle was still an interested inhabitant of this world when he wrote, "I have finished my course." The words advisedly chosen to direct the present meditation are often explained as if they had been uttered on the way to execution, and almost with the speaker's last breath. This use has doubtless been the means of great spiritual good, and is altogether proper; for it is probable that some such language would be the last spoken by the great Apostle; and he certainly was now not very far from death. But another view is quite consistent with this, and deserves attention. Though he was expecting death, and quite prepared for it, he does not appear to have regarded it as likely immediately, or very soon, to overtake him; for he desired Timothy to be with him soon, before the approaching winter if possible, and to bring with him a cloak that might be useful in the cold gaol, and some books and parchments. "The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments." Then, was he not expecting to employ some time in the pursuits of reading and writing, to which he had already devoted himself with much success, and also with great advantage to the human race? Certainly, he does not seem

to have acted like a man that has lost all interest in the affairs of this world. It brings to mind the conduct of a certain Christian, who, when consciously drawing near to death, desired to read or hear the contents of newspapers, and alleged this as the reason, "I wish to pray; and that I may know how to pray and what to pray for, let me know what God is doing in the world."

Still the Apostle here uses such language as suggests that, in his own estimation, the purpose of his earthly existence had already been really fulfilled. "*I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course.*" Let us learn that the proper state is that of a man, young or old, who can say that to him the purpose of this life is an accomplished fact. If this lesson is included in what St. Paul here says of himself, there is before us an example that must suit the youngest hearer of these words; and the example is indicative also of a privilege and a duty. Why is it so? Because the condition on which a Christian becomes able to describe his present state in the Apostle's words, is also the Divinely-appointed condition on which the end of this life is fulfilled. This may become more manifest as we proceed under the direction of these words.

The accomplishing of the purpose of this life includes the overcoming of great difficulties. "*I have fought a good fight.*" Language of this kind is of frequent occurrence in the New Testament. It teaches that obstructions are in the way, which must be removed or overcome if the end of life is not to fail. The Lord says, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Some of God's creatures accomplish the purpose of their existence naturally,

the fulfilment coming to them as a matter of course. Is not this true of all inanimate matter, and of all the beasts of the earth, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, which have no power to oppose the Divine will? Other creatures freely and gladly accomplish their purpose by such action as involves nothing properly called a fight, because they have never come under the power of evil, and have no bad propensities or powerful antagonistic circumstances to overcome. Such are the angels who never lost their first estate, and whose trial appears to have left them confirmed in virtue. And other creatures accomplish that which has *become* the modified purpose of their being, by enduring and showing just Divine retribution. Such are the unredeemed sinners spoken of in Holy Scripture as the devil and his angels.

Our case is widely different from all these. We differ from mere matter, because we are spirits; from mere animals, because we are moral; from unfallen angels, because we are not angels, and have sinned; and from unredeemed sinners, because we have a Saviour. We have come under the influence and power of evil, but we can be made victorious. The victory is achieved by the Christian and is manifold. First the gaining of it and then its retention bring into play a power graciously given by God to those who are naturally "without strength;" and here we see a sufficient reason for all the toils and pains and arduous conflicts through which the children of God have to pass in this world. But our attention must be given at present almost exclusively to the one great decisive conflict which is the first essential element in

the accomplishing of life's purpose. The minor though still important conflicts by which it is often followed, may be profitably reserved to be considered at another time.

One who has fought this good fight has gained a victory over the flesh. That which the New Testament designates "the flesh" is an enemy to God, and its action is adverse to man's real good. Consequently, so long as a man is ruled and lives according to the flesh, the purpose of his life must be failing, since to gain that purpose is to gain his real good. "To be carnally-minded is death, but to be spiritually-minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." What, then, is meant by the victory over the flesh? It does not mean that the natural and necessary functions of the body are interfered with, that appetites and passions are done away, or that concern for the house in which the spirit lives comes to an end. But it means a change, the result of which is, that thenceforth the ruling part of the nature is neither the body, as with multitudes of young and old, nor the animal soul—the seat of passion, in which man resembles brutes, or they resemble him, but the spirit—the part of his nature which makes man capable of God and of religion; and the spirit rules not independently of God, but under Divine sway, which is carried on by means of truth. John Foster had attained this state, or was determined to attain it, when he said or wrote that his spirit should either rule in his body or quit it. When this feeling

is entirely sanctified and Christian, he who has it can greatly respect himself.

Such was the state in which St. Paul had lived for years, when he wrote from the Roman gaol to Timothy. In another place, speaking of himself, he says, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." He expresses the doctrine very strongly when he says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

This victory is altogether by Divine grace. When a man has achieved it, he is no longer a slave to temper or animal passion; but he gladly does the will of God, and can boldly say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Now, who that has had experience has not found out that there must be a fight before the body can be thus overcome? And who has not found that the body once vanquished is apt to gather strength, and to rise again, as if to renew the contest? Surely, such an opposition to the evil power of fallen human nature is, with great propriety, called a fight; and he who has achieved victory herein has by Divine help fulfilled one of the conditions on which the answering of the end of life depends. He has been converted, and is now a new creature in Christ.

Again, he who has fought this good fight has gained a victory over the world. The world, in its evil sense, means unregenerate men, and their maxims, practices, and pursuits. In the worldly way goes every one whose nature has not been renewed by Divine converting grace, and who is, therefore, in the flesh in the sense already set forth. To such a one this world is

the only world cared for and thought of; and some such, though they have much intelligence, allow themselves to be quite engrossed by its affairs. But the man whose experience is like that of St. Paul, has vanquished the world. He seeks not in what he does that which this world can give him; but he has constant reference to another state of being. He does not live for fame, or learning, or power, or pleasure, or wealth. The attractions of such things are comparatively powerless, and are, therefore, easily overcome. Perhaps they did formerly allure, and he listened with pleasure to what the syren said, and was on the point of being led astray; but it is so no longer, because his heart has been changed. Such a one can use this world without abusing it! but who else can do the great thing so denoted? St. Paul had gone through this change; and the need of it would probably be, in his case, very great. For we cannot think he would pass through all the educational and other experiences of his early years, without being prompted by worldly considerations to certain actions and pursuits. But he became a new creature in Christ Jesus; and thenceforward his life was wonderful for its self-denying unworldliness. What a contest there must be, before that which is nearest to the man, most potent over present action, and most in the way of fallen nature, is thus successfully resisted and overcome!

It appears that when St. Paul was about to achieve this victory in his own case, or to survey it already achieved, he went apart from the busy world. Was not retirement necessary, in order that he might be led clearly to see what he was about, and what was

required of him, in consequence of the change which had been wrought in him by Divine grace? Does not every one seek solitude when he has passed through that conversion which implies such faith as overcomes the world, and when he desires to learn the duties which follow the great change? Without some retirement from the world, the victory over it cannot be fully confirmed, or even completely achieved.

But when this victory has been gained, such rest and comfort have been realised as none in the worldly way of life can ever possibly attain; and then there has been fulfilled another of the conditions on which the answering of the end of life depends. A reason for this is seen in the fact that when the things of this world are permitted to rule and engross a man's life, preparation for the happiness of heaven is rendered impossible.

One who has fought this good fight has gained a victory over Satan. Holy Scripture represents Satan as an evil person, antagonistic to all that is good, who has already wrought fearful mischief on earth, and still has access to men. Most plainly does the Word of God teach that he strives to make human existence a failure; and therefore the reason why he must be overcome, if the purpose of life is to be fulfilled, is evident without any discussion. "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." He is called the god of this world; and those who are yet in the worldly state are his servants. It is possible that some who serve him hardly know it. So great is his power to blind men's eyes. But others are believed to know sufficiently the relation in which they stand to him.

Satan need not oppose or disturb those who are quietly spending their days in sin, since they are doing his will ; but when a man who feels the want of salvation is meditating a full surrender to God by faith in Christ, the enemy strives to divert his thoughts, and keep him still unsaved. So the evil spirit in one of whom we read in the Gospel "threw" the poor sufferer "down," when he was attempting to go to Jesus for help and deliverance. This doctrine does not remove all the difficulties of the phenomena to which it is applied ; but, taken along with the truth concerning human depravity, it supplies a sufficient explanation of the conflict experienced by one exhorted to turn to Christ, when he feels himself strangely held back from the discharge of manifest duty ; and a little thought on such points impressively reveals a good reason why that action by which Satan is overcome is designated a fight.

Now, the Christian has certainly achieved a victory in this department of the great fight ; and what is his consequent state ? He is not exempt either from temptation or from pain consequent on Satanic influence ; but he is acquainted with Satan's devices, superior to all that he can do, and therefore able successfully to oppose his evil will and suggestions. Trusting in the Lord, he can defy the great enemy and all his allies to do him harm. Then how little can Satan have to do with most of those who have attained this blessed state. When Satan is thus overcome, it is by Divine power that he is "bruised under" the believer's feet. The Almighty fights for His servant ; but as the servant fully consents, and so fulfils a neces-

sary condition, the gaining of the victory is properly predicated of himself.

Such, then, is the manifold victory achieved in this great fight; and we must see good reason why it is called a good fight. It is good because it leads to the overcoming of evil in many forms, according to the representation which has just been made. There is great evil when the lower parts of our nature are allowed to have dominant power over the higher, when the things of the present are permitted to cause the things of the future to be neglected, and when the will of Satan is consented to and done; and these evils go together, and are indeed one multiform evil. But this great evil is overcome when, in conversion, the great fight is accomplished, though many kindred and considerable difficulties may remain.

This fight is good also, because it leads to the securing of the positive interest of human nature. The Gospel message, the meaning of which is practically and effectually realised by one who has fought this fight, is twofold. It says in effect not only, "Do thyself no harm," but also, "Gain thy true and highest good." There is much of this in the New Testament. Take one sufficient example. The Lord Jesus appeals to our sense of interest when he says, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched." What He enjoins is done when this fight is fought; for stumbling-blocks are then actually put away.

Here, then, we see one of the great excellencies of the Gospel system. Other systems have promised man

the realising of his great good, without the antecedent overcoming of his natural tendencies to evil ; but the Christian system lays the good foundation of conversion. It then proceeds to keep all right by the continued action of a principle both rational and consistent with what has already taken place. The converted man is ruled in thought and practice by the love of God, so long as he is faithful to his trust. The highest good designed for him is thus made sure ; for he is in harmony with the mind and will of God. How, on such conditions, can its attainment possibly fail ? Most properly, therefore, is the contest which I have described called in Scripture a good fight.

Notwithstanding the difficulties which remain, a living man may have accomplished this good fight *once for all*. It ought never to need repeating ; and it never does need it in the cases of those who live according to the privileges offered to the Christian in the Word of God. Though the Apostle Paul was expecting at the time to stay on earth a while longer, he says, “*I have fought,*” or “*I fought a good fight.*” Is there no special meaning in such language when it is used by a man in such circumstances as those of the Apostle ? Is there not a doctrine in the peculiarity of the language, and does it not express a high and important Christian privilege ? Indeed, could not the Apostle have used the same words in a legitimate and natural sense, at any previous period of his Christian course ? He achieved, by Divine grace, in his conversion, a great victory ; and he never, it appears, lost what was then gained ; but he lived according to the common privilege of the regenerate.

Objections might be raised to this view; but it is here presented with full conviction of its truth. It is supported by reference to what may be called the synonyms of the word conversion which occur in the New Testament. The great change is spoken of as a new birth, as a passing from darkness into light, as a deliverance from bondage, as an entrance into liberty, and as a being made alive. Surely the change thus described ought never to need repeating; and surely no one can find any good reason for returning to the state out of which this great change brings all that are saved by faith in Christ. There is much more in the New Testament relating to the point now before us than many imagine. For an example, you are referred to the Greek text of Ephesians v. 25-27, where we are taught that conversion is wrought by means of the truth, and that, having once been effected, it ought to be followed by a continuous and progressive work called sanctification, which saves from defilement and decay; and it is clearly implied that this is all that ought thenceforth to be needed.

Now, what is the extent of the work called conversion, some of the concomitants and effects of which have now been noticed? Let the same author answer. He teaches that "if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." It is not meant here that progression is then impossible, and that full Christian perfection has been attained. But surely when this great transformation has to be wrought a second time, the necessity must have arisen because of a most sinful relapse, and cannot in any sense please God; for to the

new creature in Christ is certainly given the power to hold fast what he has received. Amidst spiritual difficulties he ought ever to be able to say, "In all these things we *are* more than conquerors through Him that loved us." This is according to the provisions of the Gospel, though one who has lived in this state may fall from it, and even be "a cast-away" at last. Thus, while we think of a great privilege, we see also connected with it the possibility of most fearful evil; and this view, which very properly ends one part of the present subject, also fitly introduces another.

The full accomplishing of the purpose of this life includes constant perseverance. The Apostle says, "I have finished my course," or race. When the great fight has yielded victory in the sense explained, the man has entered on a new course. (How significant is the fact that the *great* fight is at the entrance.) Divine light has led him to think in a new way about his old subjects of thought; there are awakened in him feelings with which he previously had no acquaintance; and his daily practice also is new. There takes place, as we have already seen, a thorough and unmistakeable change. What such a one has now to do is to persevere, or as the Apostle puts it, to finish his course.

This perseverance, this finishing of the course, is not without opposition. To the youthful Christian the thought may possibly occur that it must be his privilege and happy lot to go forward without any great trial, since, through the mercy of God, he has in one grand fight won a most comprehensive and

signal victory which gives him great advantage. It might indeed be supposed that this view is favoured by what I have already said; but when the preceding statement or exposition is so taken, it is quite misunderstood. The converted man still lives in the body, is in contact with the men and the things of the world, and is exposed to the assaults of Satan. To maintain the conquest he has already gained over these opposing powers, requires much of vigilance and devout reference to God. One who has "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust," may be "again entangled in the yoke of bondage." Who has not felt this possibility as to himself, and who has not seen it become actuality in others? Appetite or passion, the blandishment or the care of the world, the desperate assault or the wheedling subtlety of the devil, has been known most detrimentally to affect and even to end the Christian life of persons of whom the highest hopes were entertained. On account of such things, the man of God is still exhorted to "fight the good fight of faith," to shun all known evil, and to hold fast the grace which he has already received, lest, without such effort, he be overcome. But the continuous fight of a holy life differs from the fight previously described, as the continuance of motion or of life differs from its origination.

The perseverance required of one who has experienced the great change is manifestly a daily work. Is not this included in the idea of completeness suggested by the words, "*I have finished my course*"? That is not a finished thing which lacks essential or integral parts. Some that are savingly enlightened

and that therefore enter on the new course, continue therein a little while, and then, becoming weary in well doing, entirely turn aside from the advantages of the great conquest. Much discouragement comes, on this account, to the persistent servants of God. Others may possibly be servants of God, even though they proceed with great irregularity, being at one time full of zeal, and at another too cold to be credited with any considerable amount of love for God or man. Such persons do not, in the proper sense of the words, persevere or finish the course; because they, in fact, periodically leave it, always with the hope of returning to it and of being found therein at last.

Very different from this is the conduct of the man who lives according to the privilege of the Gospel provision. He continues in the way entered at the great victory, and, if the expression may be used, finishes off the religious work of the time, as the time comes and goes. Consequently he has, at every period, to look back upon a course in the best sense completed. Thus he avoids the evil which some perpetrate, by wilful neglect of duty, of heaping up matter for future repentance, thereby hazarding eternal welfare. It is a profitable exercise to such a one, when a day or some other period has transpired, to review it, considering what account it has carried to Almighty God, and how the record might have been better. He is generally saved, by his constant recollection and faith in God, from being overtaken in a fault. He is often able to hide himself from coming evils. He strives to improve his time as it comes and goes. The very shortcomings of the past are made to yield good by teaching how

things may be done better in the future. This is daily perseverance in the way of righteousness entered at the new birth.

One who thus lives has already, in a very significant and blessed sense, accomplished the purpose of his earthly life. Perhaps, like St. Paul, he did much evil among men before his conversion; and we forget not that sin, though pardoned, and therefore no longer remembered for condemnation, must still have left some effects in himself or in others in the modification of their characters, and may or must have effects in their endless conditions. Pardon is not the extinction of facts; and all will be treated in the judgment and eternally according to their works. Or he may be young, and may have yet to live on earth for years in the service of God, ripening for the better world, and performing many things which will both help others, and increase his own heavenly reward. Still, in either of these two cases, as well as in one contrary to them both, the man has, in a perfectly consistent sense of the words, accomplished the purpose of his life; for he is now satisfied in Christ, and prepared for happiness after death; and for any service in which God could now desire him to engage, in any world to which He could now determine to send him.

This preparedness does not depend on the number of a man's years, or the length of his Christian course. He who, whether young or old, is properly finishing his course as he goes along, can say, "I have come to God's mind, and it is my delight to do His will; and though my nature shrinks at the prospect of death, yet I am prepared even for that, and for what will follow,

because I have put my trust in God, to whom all worlds belong, and who governs them Himself." Happy must such a one be, because he knows and feels that his earthly existence is not a failure, but a grand success, and must be remembered for ever with delight.

With this, contrast the case of a man whose success is of the highest order as to this world's affairs, but who is unprepared for the happiness of heaven. The failure of the one is as awful as the success of the other is glorious; and when the divergence of the two courses has continued for ages upon ages, how fearfully vast must the difference be!

The impression made by these reflections may need some qualification; and, therefore, let me observe that when perseverance, or the finishing of the course, fails in any degree, this failure must affect the amount of the realised good of heaven. How can we avoid this conclusion when we admit that we are to be the same persons for ever, and that we are to be eternally treated according to our doings in this world? Allusion has already been made to the probable effects of pardoned sin. Must not the same principle apply to the shortcomings of those who live the Christian life? Does not shortcoming involve a loss which can never be fully repaired? When a man has backslidden in heart in any degree, or has lost any portion of the vigour of his spiritual life, how, though he may be quickened again, can he ever be or act as if he had from the first duly persevered? Some one has said that when a stone falls, by being put aside at the proper time, to get to the place in a building for which it was intended and

most suited, it can never be made the most of, though it be, during the course of the erection, gathered and used. Must not this principle apply to the heavenly state? How can those who serve God with half-heartedness or irregularity stand at last on a par with such as persevere throughout, and in the proper sense finish their courses? Must there not necessarily result from the operation of this principle some of the differences in the heavenly states that are hinted at not very obscurely in Holy Writ?

This does not involve the incongruous notion of pain in heaven; but it does involve this, that the question, Why are those nearer to the throne than I am? will be both asked and answered; and where is the incongruity of this? We know, further, that all will cordially acquiesce in the results of the operation of the law which God wisely ordained, and then graciously revealed, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." O that all would give heed to the exhortation given, in accordance with this principle, by the Apostle John, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." 2 John 8. Will very many have a *full* heavenly reward, having entirely accomplished the purpose of a probationary life?

Man is not sufficient of himself to fulfil what is thus evidently required of him; and the accomplishment of the purpose of this life depends on yielding to Divine guidance. St. Paul says of himself, "I have kept the faith."

The will of God had been specially revealed to St. Paul, and he must have been as sure of it as he was of

his own existence, or anything of which he was directly conscious. This would arise from the peculiarity of the way in which communications had been made to him. Besides, he fully and cordially believed what he had been led to know, and laboured to convey the uncorrupted truth to others, and to discharge all other duties ascertained by revelation. In so doing, he was strengthened and aided by the Holy Ghost, who dwelt within him to comfort and direct as well as to inspire. Properly, therefore, is he said to have been Divinely guided, and to have lived as he did live for this reason. Thus he "kept the faith."

Though our case is very different, yet the will of God has been sufficiently declared to us by means of a Book written under revealing inspiration by qualified men. It contains a full verbal expression of human duty, of the way in which the purpose of this life is to be accomplished. Besides, to us also is given the Holy Spirit, that we may be enabled first to understand our duty, and then to do it. When we fully consent to the truth, and persevere in the practising of what we have learned, we also keep the faith, and live under Divine guidance; and the only known way in which we can be Divinely guided, is in thus keeping the faith.

But why is this keeping of the faith, this cordial submission to Divine guidance, essential to the accomplishing of the purpose of this transitory life? In answer to this question, let me direct your thoughts to man's feebleness, and God's authority.

Man is the subject of great and manifold imperfection; and the wants which thence arise loudly call for

such help as none but God can supply. Absolute perfection belongs exclusively to Him. Unless directed by God, the wisest creature must be liable, because of his necessary imperfection, to misapprehend something, and at times to err in statement and mislead in counsel. We, in this world, are very ignorant, though we know a little about ourselves and surrounding creatures; and we ought to desire to ascertain, as far as we can, what that is for which we have been created and put into our present circumstances, and how we may duly answer God's design. But who is to tell us, and grant our desires? We see that all creatures are so ignorant, as to be incapable of satisfactorily answering the questions which are of greatest and most vital importance to us. We therefore want to know if God has been pleased to declare, on His own authority, what He wills as to our present state, and if the declaration is level to our comprehension. This question is confidently answered in the affirmative, because we have assurance that God has so done. The Bible is to be examined for full authoritative information. Such direction as it supplies is the only certainly right direction known in the universe; and it cannot possibly lead us astray when properly followed. God is too wise to err in thus providing for the direction of His creatures; and on this ground we conclude that that Divine guidance which is essential to the accomplishing of the purpose of life, is a thing to which men are most reasonably and properly required to yield.

God's authority is original and supreme; and His will is binding. No creature can have the right to form a purpose contrary to His, or to act in assumed inde-

pendence of Him. When He is pleased, all must be well; but when He is displeased, nothing can be well. Difficulties in the Book that has been shown, independently of them, assuredly to reveal His will, do not make submission to its directions less obligatory. The impossibility of answering certain questions left unresolved, neither removes nor modifies the duty of hearty acquiescence in that which has been authoritatively declared, and of cordial trust in Him who has, through His agents, made it known.

When we see the consistency, and feel the force of such reflections, we discover and are prepared to inspect the reason why many do not accomplish the purpose of this life. It is because they refuse to come to agreement with the will of God. This refusal is utterly unreasonable, and cannot at all promote the creature's good, but must result in direst failure, for reasons which are easily made to appear. God's will is the only infallibly right will; and therefore it is the only will on condition of compliance with which the infallibly wise Divine purpose as to man's earthly life is necessarily fulfilled; and it is not conceivable that this purpose can possibly be fulfilled by compliance with another will that differs.

Then, how fearful must be the natural consequences of persistently opposing the will of God, and putting into its place the determination of a rebellious creature! When these things are done, the course of which I have spoken cannot be either finished or in any proper sense entered upon, because the great necessarily antecedent fight can be neither accomplished nor even begun; and the inevitable consequence must be a great

and lamentable failure of the purpose of life on earth. This failure will be the subject of the next lecture.

Yet many, who know all these things, do not strive to overcome their natural tendency to oppose God; and some even strangely try to excuse themselves therein. They inevitably fail effectually to do so; and with reference to such persons, the ground of an appeal is found in the fact, that when God demands submission to His declared will, He treats man according to the principles of the nature He has given him. This nature is such, that a person's character must be determined by the possession or the want of faith in God. When objection is made to this arrangement, one answer that may be returned is to the following effect. God is infinitely wise, and can have made no mistake in determining as to the nature which man should have; and the consequent is now perfectly consistent with the antecedent, when He treats His creature according to the nature which he must for ever have. God cannot treat him in any other way. It follows that when men find fault with the way in which moral character is determined and endless destiny is settled, they complain, in fact, of the way in which the Omniscient God determined as to their creation, rather than of the way in which they are governed. How is it possible to avoid this conclusion? And surely it is most fearful blasphemy, when a creature in effect tells his Creator that a mistake was made in his creation, and he has such a nature as he ought not to have. This blasphemy can result from nothing but such intellectual pride, and such badness of heart, as plainly show that man has most dreadfully fallen. The great

question, which ought to determine the choice of the whole conduct of every one is this, Has God spoken to declare His will? No wonder that those who answer this question in the negative can live selfish and unholy lives; which is known to have been true of many infidels. But from an affirmative answer comes the conclusion, Then *I must* believe what He says, and do what He enjoins; and the natural opposition of my depraved heart furnishes no excuse for refusing this compliance.

Thus have we considered the accomplishment of the purpose of this transitory life, reflecting on its means, its process, and its condition. O that the truth on this subject were universally known and practically regarded! Then how happy would men be on earth, how certainly would heaven's glory be begun below! May this great privilege of the Christian life be quickly known to all; and let every one that knows what it is live daily in full consistency with this prayer:—

“ This blessed word be mine
Just as the port is gained,
' Kept by the power of grace Divine,
I have the faith maintained.'
The' Apostles of my Lord,
To whom it first was given,
They could not speak a greater word,
Nor all the saints in heaven.”



IV.—THE GREAT FAILURE.

HAVING considered the great purpose of life, and the way in which it is accomplished, I in the next place naturally raise the question of
The Failure of this Great Purpose.

In relation to this part of the subject, the life of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the Divine dealings with them consequent on their conduct, will be found very instructive. Much may be learned from those wanderings when they are regarded as typifying the Christian's sojourn on earth. There were numerous difficulties, and much opposition had to be encountered in circumstances of great unpleasantness and irritation. It was, indeed, a very severe probation which God appointed to the chosen people; but it gave them excellent opportunities for judging of one another, for befriending one another, and for acquiring that character of patient confidence in God in which, with regard to men, He most delights. Yet it was not wholly unpleasant; for God plainly declared, and abundantly proved His mercy and tender care; and the people were sustained by the hope of better things.

So all have difficulties in the pilgrimage of the present life; and to some they are overpoweringly great. It is matter of common experience and observation, and of very frequent remark, that tribulation comes to all, and that earthly comforts are often

seriously interfered with, and sometimes quite destroyed thereby. Yet "hope springs eternal in the human breast," and sustains men of all classes, but especially those who have become children of God; for they have a lively hope, and even a present foretaste of its object, as the people in the wilderness once had grapes of Eshcol.

God had a purpose as to the wandering in the desert. His people had lived in Egypt amidst such scenes and under such influences as had naturally tended to disqualify and disincline them for the service that would be required of them in the promised land; the new and peculiar experiences through which they had to pass were intended to prepare them for that service; and the land was to be given at last to those who should be found at the time fit for its possession, and for the work appointed to be done. When the severe but gracious discipline had answered its design, they were to rest from the difficulties and pains of the wilderness, and to have in their own land great and varied good. How would they wonder and talk to one another of the advantages of the state to which they were going!

So God has a purpose as to man's life on earth. We have already considered what this purpose is, and seen that when it has been finally accomplished, the rest and the varied good of heaven are realised for ever. On earth the believer rests in Christ; but after death he rests in a fuller sense, namely, from all that is any way painful or evil. He rests in the presence of Jesus, who has said to His own, "I will receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also;" and he rests also with most delightful companions, as those who at

length reached Canaan were so connected that they could be of great and good service to one another. In order to qualify us for that end, God is pleased to take us in this life through many and various experiences both painful and pleasant. As the Israelites had to go through the sea, so we have to pass from bondage to liberty, in our new birth or conversion. Then we have to proceed towards the heavenly state, in freedom, yet amidst many adversities that arise from the world, the flesh, and the devil; but "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose;" and here is what ought to encourage and inspirit us in all our tribulations; for God must know what is needed in any case to insure the answering of the end designed.

To most of those whom He had brought out of the house of bondage, God's purpose as to the wandering in the desert failed. Oh! how many started for a land they never reached! Their bad conduct and strange example have been made the means of much instruction and great benefit to men of succeeding generations. Numerous passages in the Old Testament indicate that their descendants were able to profit by their history; and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has turned the thoughts of thousands of Christians of successive ages to the same facts, for lessons that must have had great and salutary influence on their minds and lives. One of the lessons which he inculcates is this, that men, even professing Christians, may fail to accomplish the purpose which God has formed as to their lives on earth. The Israelites "fell,"

failed, or perished, as to the earthly end of their wanderings; and it might have been as well for some of them for this world, if they had remained in Egypt; but this does not involve the conclusion that they were finally lost. We cannot doubt that many would repent of sin, find acceptance with God, and be eternally saved. But surely the case of all who died in the wilderness may be studied by us with great advantage. If we may fall, fail, or perish as to the purpose for which we pass through this world, let us consider, for instruction and warning, what is or may be involved in such a failure.

One element of great distress to those who fail will be the punishment of exclusion from heaven, which is represented as our Father's house above, the eternal home of those who shall have accomplished the end of living on earth. In the Gospels there occur several passages which have the same general meaning as the following:—"And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And He said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait-gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity.

There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." Luke xiii. 22-30.

The following is one of the ways in which the thought may be expanded. God has provided or is providing a great feast in a most glorious palace, which will be lighted with His own essential glory, and in which every one present will be supremely happy. He has sent out many messengers to call men to the feast, that He may have very many guests. Every true evangelist is such a messenger; and where the Gospel is not known, the call is made through conscience. Thousands of thousands, nay, all mankind, are bidden. Some of them accept the invitation, and in due time enter the palace to enjoy the feast; but others reject it until it ceases to be given, and are not permitted then to enter, however bitterly they may repent. By-and-by the appointed time will have expired. Then the Master of the house, the great King, will rise up and shut the door, thereby declaring that no more can be admitted. Then all that rejected the gracious invitation will be found without; and among them will be many who never intended that things should so end. They will be in outer darkness, which will stand in strange contrast with the light in which the saved will be known to be; and "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Why will the excluded ones weep and gnash their teeth? Because of their being shut out and of the consequences that will follow. The language indicates great misery; and must not the one fact of exclusion cause hell enough? Then may a man be heard to say, "I was graciously invited to be in that assembly of the blessed, but I would not accept the invitation; and it is now too late. I am a failure; I am a miserable being; and the cause is all in myself?" How disastrous must be such an issue of the earthly life! And who that thinks does not pray that it may never come to him? For who can bear the thought of being thus shut away and locked out by the key of destiny from his Father's house? Yet what else can be done with those who fail to acquire the character which qualifies for admission?

And let me add, that God may be pleased, for aught that we can know, to add to the punishment of exclusion that of positive pain inflicted in token of His own displeasure, and in the vindication and exercise of His own authority. On this question the great and all-decisive question is, What has God declared in His own Word? The true answer to this question any unsophisticated person can, it is believed, easily discern. But instead of asking this question in the proper way, and abiding by the answer found, some long and strive to dispose of the matter by antecedent and independent reasonings of their own as to what, in their opinion, ought to be or must be; and they come to the Bible with foregone conclusions. Who can approve of this? For God surely must know all about the matter; and if He has made a declaration, the only proper action that

man can take is to accept that declaration, to acquiesce therein in all such things as that now under notice, and accordingly to surrender his own reason and choice. The objections raised against this doctrine can easily be answered. Then what has God said ?

There are many passages in His Word, and particularly in the New Testament, in which positive pain is very prominently set forth as an element in the future condition of those who die out of Christ. It is impossible otherwise consistently to understand, for example, these solemn and monitory words of our Lord Himself, "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Mark ix. 43, 44. I trust it is not in ignorance, but after due consideration, that these words are applied to the subject now under discussion; and this specimen passage will suffice for the present purpose. Some tell us that the common acceptation of such language is not correct, because it is not conceivable that God can put His own children into unquenchable and therefore endless fire in any natural sense of the words. The answer is that it is not inconceivable, and that the statement now repeated simply begs the question; since man cannot know what God can do, except so far as God has been pleased to tell him. The inquiry therefore returns, What has God said? If the Lord Jesus has declared that God will certainly do that thing which some pronounce inconceivable, we are simply bound to believe what He says. We are also bound to act accordingly, notwithstanding our

inability to remove the difficulties which cluster round the subject.

Then what is Jesus properly understood to mean, when He thus speaks of fire? It is plain that He points to an evil and distressing condition worse than a certain state on earth, which He also defines; and He illustrates the unseen and unknown by means of what is both seen and known. Those to whom He spoke knew something of material fire, its operation, and its effects; for had they not seen and even felt its action? What the Lord said to them seems to amount to this: "If you wish to know what will be the ultimate condition of those who fail to accomplish the purpose of their existence, think of the severest pain known to you now. Think, for example, of the action and the effects of fire on your living flesh. How great the pain! Then understand, that similarly painful to all parts of the deathless nature will be that which God will bring or suffer to come on those who will have failed to answer their purpose. Their punishment will be fiery, because it will bring them intense distress."

Is not this a natural and consistent explanation, so far as it goes, of the Lord's words? Now He who taught this doctrine taught also that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" and all the teachings of the incarnate Son of God must agree.

Moreover, the last that we hear in Holy Scripture of those who have failed to answer their purpose is, that they are still in the punishment in which the final judgment left them. From that judgment the wicked

“go away into everlasting punishment;” and if any one says that “everlasting” means only “age-long,” I answer, with at least equal authority, assertion being put against assertion, that it means eternal or unending. This is implied in the strange imperatives found in the last chapter of the New Testament. Those conditions or states will be perpetuated in which men will be found when the Mediator shall have wound up the affairs of His mediatorial administration, “that God may be all in all.” All gracious influences will then have been withdrawn from the minds of the lost, because of the winding up of that administration. That which God deems the best will have been done with those who will have failed. They will still belong to God, as His property; and as such He will put them away in the place appointed for failures. This thought is put in a very striking way in the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm, where we read, “Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross.” When a man is disappointed by the utter failure of a thing to answer the end which he contemplated in its purchase or construction, is he not apt to put it away in some unfrequented corner of his house that is devoted to lumber? And do not the words just quoted from the Psalm naturally lead us to reflect that the wicked, those who have finally failed, are, in God’s estimation, the moral refuse of the universe, and are as such put away in some appointed place? And if, as we have already seen, they are there to be visited with the vengeance of eternal fire, there will come a period in their existence when their misery will far exceed all present conception and computation. Oh, awful prospect!

Such, then, is believed to be a portion of the whole truth concerning this great failure. Who that has apprehended it does not tremble lest he fail? To what is so great a failure to be attributed? The answer to this question is found in the declared reason why God's purpose as to the life of the wilderness failed to so many of His people: "They could not enter in because of unbelief." The doctrine is, that they were impersuasible or disobedient. God had certainly spoken to them; and they must have been quite sure of this, because of the plagues of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea, and many other miraculous interpositions. Yet they did not obey the word which had come to them with the fullest and highest possible authority. This is the sufficient reason why they were not fit for the promised land, and why the discipline of the desert failed to answer its end. "For without faith it is impossible to please God;" since the character which its absence implies and necessitates is evil, and therefore contrary to God's mind.

The failure of the purpose of life is accounted for on the same principle. Its occasion or cause is unbelief, or disobedience, that practical unbelief of Divine truth which shows itself in actual disobedience to the known will of God. God has been pleased fully to declare what He requires of men, in order that they may ultimately realise consummate good; and all His requirements are summarised in these words, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." When the principle thus expressed is actualised in the convictions, the feelings, and the practice of any one, that person is, as we have already seen, accomplishing the purpose of his

existence; for, submitting constantly to God, he lives in the daily exercise of what Holy Scripture calls faith; and we read that "he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." But when this principle does not so become actual, the purpose of life fails, because of the naturally destructive operation of unbelief. "He that believeth not shall be damned." We see then that out of unbelief there arise the direst and most calamitous consequences, and the conviction of their mere possibility may well cause us to attend with interest and docility to the subject now before us.

For how solemn to any man is the thought that the purpose of his life may fail! Think of a man whose property should all be invested in the cargo of a single ship, and the continuance of whose livelihood and comfort should be only as probable as the success of one voyage. How impressive to such a one would it be to read or think of storms and wrecks; and how ready would he be at personal application. But this is precisely what many are unready and indisposed to do with reference to the failure of the purpose of life; and yet how insignificant is the one failure in comparison with the other.

But this awful and impressive possibility is reasonable. That failure must follow the unbelief already defined is God's own appointment. We have already seen that in this God treats man according to the principles of the nature He has given him. These principles are such that every man has in his own hands, in a certain and important degree, the shaping and the determination of his own character and destiny; and God could not have created such moral beings, and

placed them in such circumstances, if it had not been better to do it than not to do it. God has entirely settled this matter Himself. This fact must appear very significant when much considered; and it can be intelligently considered, for we are sufficiently informed in the Bible of the way in which the matter has been settled. Such being the case, how blasphemously presumptuous must that creature be, who says or thinks that it is unreasonable for men to be punished with the failure of the purpose of their existence, when they have not submitted to God's ordination; for the positive reasonableness of this appointment is in proportion to the infinite wisdom of God, who made it; and the consistency of the doctrine must be manifest to any one who has clearly apprehended and duly considered the peculiarity of a moral nature. Who, then, that has ever been guilty of dissenting in practice or in theory from this Divine appointment does not feel ashamed of himself and full of remorse, when he reflects that his dissension absurdly amounts to the charging of the Infinite with imperfection? But "God is love," and can make no mistake; and in all that we know of the Divine nature there is nothing that can be made to show excuse for the man who allows the purpose of his life to fail. The failure is the natural result of his own disobedience. "The wages of sin is death." Persistent disobedience to the Divine will must inevitably end in the acquiring of such a character as simply disqualifies for heaven and prepares for hell; of which enough for the present purpose has already been said.

Think of the positive unreasonableness of following "the same example of unbelief." The subject thus

suggested is so many-sided, that it might be pursued in thought at great length, and treated in the present connection with great variety of illustration. But a short selection must suffice. I hope by this attempt to make thankful such as have ceased to follow this example, to bring them to settled opposition thereto, and to lead such as are now following it to desist therefrom.

It has already appeared that the purpose of life fails, because it is allowed by the individual so to be. Thus, when the purpose is allowed to fail, the creature sets up his own desires and will against the authority of God. This is but another way of describing the unbelief already defined; but this change of language may be attended with some advantage to those who ought to be willing to see the evil of what is or was among their habits. There are very many such. Indeed, all have transgressed the law of God; and this opposition is an element in all sin.

God's authority is supreme, and the creature's complete happiness depends on that practical acknowledgment which brings God the glory He most desires. But when He has not this glory, the opposition of unbelief is quite ineffectual to prevent His being glorified; and, indeed, it must bring Him glory in its own way. He is the end as well as the source and the sustainer of all things. "Of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." "All things were created by Him and for Him." He must have glory from all that His hands have made and His fiat has constantly sustained. A moral agent may for a time withhold from Him that homage or service that He requires; but he cannot prevent the great End of all from having glory from

his existence. Indeed, the Bible plainly and amply reveals that when glory is not yielded it must be, in a sense, extorted. It informs us that some sinners are already lost; and the little that it makes known about their punishments, shows they are such that all observers of them may well be supposed to tremble. The revealed doom of the lost does and must manifest the inflexibility of the justice with which the moral universe is governed. We are also informed that vengeance is yet to be taken on other sinners, who are to be banished from the presence of the Lord into that condition of exclusion and distress which has already been described. Now, that course which so ends may greatly glorify God, but cannot yield ultimate good to man in any sense or any way. Indeed, it must issue in great positive disadvantage of many kinds. For he who has departed the earthly life in unbelief is a criminal, and must have among the beings that know him the reputation of criminality; so that he cannot have the cordial approval of others, he cannot be self-approved, and he must be condemned by God.

Then how unreasonable is that unbelief or disobedience which causes the purpose of life to fail, and destroys the soul! and who that lives in it can have proper self-respect? Surely a very wise person cannot be reminded of all these things, without being led to the conclusion, that the course which leads to such results ought to be forthwith abandoned. But that men are miserably unwise in respect of such things is matter of common observation, and, I may say, experience, especially with those who strive to lead

men into the path of life and glory. May those to whom these thoughts come find them promotive of true wisdom !

When the purpose of this life is allowed to fail, the finite is preferred to the infinite ; and this also is unreasonable and evil. The Israelites in the wilderness took what they could get by transiently pleasing themselves, instead of what God had promised them as an enduring good. So it is with those the purpose of whose lives is allowed to fail. Sin may, in this world, bring a man that to which the name of good is with some propriety given. When he does what God has forbidden, he seeks his own gratification or advantage ; and the object at which he aims may be good in its way. The Lord tells us, that when a person gives alms for the praise of men, and gets it, he has his reward. Likewise, when a man aims at getting wealth or some other earthly good of body or of mind, and does get it, he has the reward of all his efforts, the reward for which he looked ; and when an unconverted, unbelieving man seeks and finds pleasure in sin, he has his reward. But how small is the total sum of such good realised in a lifetime by the most successful and self-indulgent ; and how short is the time in which it can be enjoyed ; so that it is finite in quantity and in duration. This applies to every case in which temporary advantage is gained by sin. But the good that a man gets who so lives in this world as to answer the end of life will be, or is, infinite in duration and in quantity. Spiritual good begins to him on earth, and is to be continued and augmented for ever in heaven ; for "there shall be no more curse." It may

be true that at any point in duration, the amount of the past or realised good will be calculable and expressible in figures or in words, the good of a holy earthly life being taken as a unit; but then, since it is to be perpetuated and increased eternally, a calculation made to-day must be incorrect to-morrow; and so the thing must go on for ever. Then, must not the sum of that heavenly good be infinite, in a sense of the word that need not at all mislead? This partly shows us the nature of the bargain struck, so to speak, by one who allows the purpose of his life to fail. For trifling present advantage, he gives up the inconceivably great good of endless duration. What language is strong enough to condemn such conduct as it deserves? And who does not at heart commend those who labour to persuade men to turn away from such folly, setting the example themselves?

Such bartering is a thing which no one can with reason defend. Indeed, he must be bereft of reason who could attempt to defend it. The thing would be as absurd as trying to show that time may absorb or annul eternity, or that some finite may exceed an infinite. Then every man who is allowing the purpose of his existence to fail, involves himself in a position utterly indefensible, for which he cannot in any degree respect himself, or look for the good opinion of the truly wise and excellent. But though nothing can reasonably be said in defence of such a course of life, yet it is pursued by very many; and is it not wonderful that its manifest unreasonableness does not so terribly convince of inconsistency and folly as to drive from it all who know the truth? The fact that it is not so, shows that something

more than clear views is needed, when a man is to be led to depart from the path in which he has been overtaken by a conviction of its absurdity and inconsistency. The thing required differs much from such a conviction, though it may be promoted thereby, and though he may do good who can set forth this absurdity in clear and impressive terms.

And this indefensible barter cannot be merely excused with a good conscience. When a man is convinced that he belongs to another world in a fuller and more important sense than that in which he belongs to this, and that in this world he prepares for the future, he must see and feel that it is his duty and his privilege to have reference in all his conduct to that other world. This conviction is opposed, and he must see and feel that it is opposed, when he pays chief or practically exclusive attention to the things of this perishing world, things which he must leave behind even long before the time of their perdition. On what ground can any plausible excuse be built for such living as this, which inevitably involves most ruinous consequences? If a man tries to excuse it by reference to the fact that many have so lived before him, how can he fail to see that this affords no excuse, unless all sins may be excused? If he says his fallen nature has a strong tendency, and forcibly urges him in the direction in which he goes, the obvious answer is, that the evil tendencies of human nature ought to be resisted, and that Divine grace is offered to all, by which superiority to evil can be attained and kept, so that this is no excuse. In like manner, and with equal facility, all apparent excuses for a life of sin can be disposed of; and when

the utter futility of all excuses is clearly seen, how can they be urged with a good conscience? When a man has not a good conscience, but is self-condemned because self-opposed, he must be unhappy. The unhappiness caused in this way is sometimes very great.

These views are believed to be held generally by such as have much acquaintance with both human nature and the Word of God. How often has the following language been referred to as giving a correct expression to a fact of very frequent occurrence :

“ Si possem, sanior essem.
Sed trahit invitam nova vis ; aliudque Cupido,
Mens aliud suadet. Video meliora, proboque ;
Deteriora sequor.”

Men of all classes seem to have agreed in regarding such words as truly descriptive of what is very commonly experienced and shown in action. But we are now told by a philosopher that though a man may possibly see the right and pursue the wrong, yet this seldom actually happens. Then which of these manifestly contradictory sentiments is the correct one? They may be partly tested in application to our present subject. Is it true or false, that many who are quite convinced that they belong to another world far more than to this, and that that world is far more important than this, are daily neglecting to prepare for the good of that world, and preferring thereto the transient enjoyments of the present state? Is it true or false that many who thus live are so convinced that God has revealed such another world, that they are ready to contend for the truth against all opposers? If these things are done, which probably few can doubt, it is

also true that the right is seen and the wrong is done, that in some cases the best is seen and the worst is done. What, then, are we to think of the dictum uttered by Mr. J. S. Mill, in his St. Andrew's Address, that "those who follow the wrong have generally first taken care to be voluntarily ignorant of the right. They have silenced their conscience, but they are not knowingly disobeying it?"

To say nothing more of the points already suggested, is there not palpable disagreement between this doctrine and the following words of the Lord Jesus: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved or discovered. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God"? John iii. 19-21. According to this language, men do commonly "see the better, and yet the worse pursue;" though they may, I admit, try to avoid such things as would fully reveal to themselves how evil their conduct is. Then must they not know they are going wrong, and be self-condemned? How self-contradictory is poor human nature; and how powerless is mere intellectual culture to prevent this.

An additional reflection which appears to rise naturally out of what has been said is, that he who allows the purpose of his life to fail, acts suicidally. Many proceed in life in ways which must involve this failure, with full or at least due knowledge of the thing. They oppose the supreme authority of God, and

prefer the finite to the infinite; and they know it. They know also that they are not consenting to the conditions on which alone eternal good is possible, and that they are fulfilling the terms on which the soul is prepared for perdition. Yet they continue so to do. Is not this most properly denominated a suicidal course of life? Who can describe and condemn it in language sufficiently strong and alarming? The greatest temporary calamity that can occur on earth is as nothing, when compared with what men thus bring upon themselves by courses of action which they can neither defend or excuse.

How strange is the condition of his nature who can forfeit the greatest interest of his being for a present trifle! Is not such a condition non-natural? How else could an intelligent being so act? Beings whose natures have never been warped are unable to do anything that can properly be brought into comparison with this. Brutes do not purposely kill themselves; but man is capable of bringing himself to eternal death, with full knowledge of what is taking place. Thus we see that when the purpose of life fails, the evil is brought about by a course of suicidal action.

It may be that some that have accompanied me thus far know and feel with thankfulness that the purpose of their being is not failing. They have fully consented to what they have learned; they feel that the greatest work of life is accomplished; and what they have now to do is, to hold fast what has been attained, and to advance according to the provision which God has made. All such are to be congratulated, and ought to be inexpressibly grateful. Let them strive daily to

“grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” and to do much good to others by example and advice. O that there were more instruction in the lives of those who “profess and call themselves Christians,” for such as are anxiously inquiring about the way to avoid the failure of life’s great end! A great change for the better has yet to take place in this respect, although we must not forget that there is even now much that calls for devout gratitude to Almighty God. Who in a country like this cannot find among his own acquaintances some one whose daily life shows the power of true religion? Those who live in sin are therefore the more completely without excuse.

Does any one that hears these words feel that he has lived until this time in the way of failure? Let him think deeply on the subject, and pray in faith for Divine illumination and help. Thinking will promote clearness of conception, and depth and power of feeling. He will be led to see the fearfulness of his position in being thus far a failure.

A profound conviction of this will be attended with most bitter feeling, from which he will be urged to seek relief. This bitter feeling will give him some little ability to judge of the distress occasioned in the end by the conviction of final failure. If it is so painful to feel that things *are* failing, oh, what will it be to feel that things *have* failed for ever, and that the convicted and condemned one has actually come under the full penalty of the violated law? When he is urged by these thoughts and feelings to seek Divine relief, he will feel the need of prayer, and will find the proper place for faith.

It is manifest that you cannot save yourself, or be saved by any other creature, from the final failure of which we have been thinking. Welcome, therefore, is the promise that God will help you. This promise given through Jesus Christ, and based upon the atonement, is what you have to believe; and he that truly believes the glorious Gospel can never fail. "He that believeth shall be saved." Let us then be encouraged and profitably warned; and let us give heed to the exhortation which has, in some degree, directed us in this lecture: "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." God has no pleasure in the endless death of the sinner. He would have all men saved on earth and in heaven. All will be saved except those to whom mercy cannot possibly be shown. We read of those transgressors who under the Old Dispensation had to die without benefit of mercies; and an inspired writer, referring to their cases, asks, "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" Another asks, "What shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel?" Such questions are not minutely answered in the Word of God. There must be some good reason for this fact. But the questions themselves ought to be sufficient to awaken great concern in the mind of one who knows he is doing the thing about the ultimate consequences of which they are asked. My brethren, remember that the prudent man foreseeeth the evil and

hideth himself; have such prudence in reference to the matter under notice; and determine that, the Lord being merciful to you, you will not fail.

His mercy, without which you must fail, is free for all that ask it aright; and this failure is against all reason as well as all interest. It is indeed irreparable ruin. Then let your constant desire be that which is thus expressed, in his quaint way, by Quarles:

“ Eternal God ! O Thou that only art
The sacred fountain of eternal light,
And blessed loadstone of my better part,
O Thou, my heart's desire, my soul's delight !
Reflect upon my soul, and touch my heart,
And then my heart shall prize no good above Thee ;
And then my soul shall know Thee ; knowing, love Thee ;
And then my trembling thoughts shall never start
From Thy commands, or swerve the least degree,
Or once presume to move, but as they move in Thee.”



V.—RELATIONSHIPS.

MAN is social in constitution, tendency, and choice. This characteristic is not one of those things which have resulted from the fall. It belongs essentially to human nature; and it was at work in the time of original innocence. Of Adam, before he sinned, "the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." That man's nature is still in this respect the same is abundantly proved by the facts of family life, and other facts which are offered to our observation on every hand. This characteristic is of great interest, and deserves our most careful and devout consideration; and such a department of the present subject cannot with propriety be left unconsidered. But what way of studying it is calculated to yield the greatest profit? Perhaps it will be if we think of

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in general, not confining attention either to that already referred to, or to any other. These relationships, then, are many, or rather innumerable. They correspond with all varieties of condition and employment, some being more and others less intimate and influential. After the relationship of husband and wife, the most intimate is that of parent and child. It is such that children often are in many respects just what their parents make them by personal influence. Then there are the rela-

tionships of more distant family connections, of members of the same Church, of friends, of neighbours, of men of business, of authors and readers, of tutors and pupils, of employers and servants, and very many more.

These things are facts of every day life, open to the observation and the thought of all. To be able to think correctly of these relationships, and of the duties, difficulties, privileges, and responsibilities which belong to them, is matter for congratulation and thankfulness. Yet it is evidently what some have not attained, if we may judge by the manifest indifference with which they can receive doctrine and exhortation concerning the fact of a universal moral influence. To contribute something towards this correct thinking is the purpose at present held in view; and I believe it will be well for us in this meditation to keep in mind that which has been called the golden rule of Christianity, and which is found in our Lord's words, "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

Society has an influence on every one of its members. No one surrounded by fellow-men can live in entire independence of all other persons. The case of a person quite beyond the reach of all direct and indirect social influence would differ widely from all that we have ever seen. What would such a one necessarily become in a series of years? If a young man, at the earliest age at which he might be able to sustain himself in his new circumstances, should be taken away from human society and made the sole inhabitant of a solitary and unfrequented island, how great a difference would there be after a dozen years

between him and another of the same age who had lived all the time in the ordinary way. Two such men brought together, and exhibited for the illustration of the effects of social influence, would make a deep and powerful impression on the observers; and it is very difficult, in the absence of some extraordinary or special illustration, to secure for the point before us a due estimate of its importance.

In all the relations of life previously mentioned, there are at work influences which must often imperceptibly, but always surely, modify the characters and lives of those on whom they work. Those who have had long experience know that this is strikingly the case in some of the more intimate connections of life; and it is not less true that those more distantly related have influence on one another in ways and to an extent which often far exceed all that they can suspect. Many of the influences to which I am now referring are most attenuated and subtle, and cannot well in any case be at first much suspected; but ought they not on this very account to be the more carefully considered? The actions which I have seen men do, and other actions to me unseen; looks of which I have known a portion of the meaning, and other looks that have perplexed me; words that I have heard, and other words unheard by me that have affected the conduct of others towards myself; a thousand sermons and speeches, and ten thousand conversations which have fallen on my ears, and conveyed something to my mind, and driven something else away; myriads of thoughts gathered from books and newspapers and letters, that have engaged the mind, and kept me from

meditations or states of vacancy which would otherwise have been ; and many other such things, coming on me in innumerable ways from my fellow-men, must have contributed to the modification of my character ; and their influence must, in an evident sense, be upon me still. Then I could not have been to-day what I am, if I had not passed through the circumstances of my past life.

Yet one who holds that all this is true does not necessarily believe that man is the creature of circumstances. Every man, being free, has to choose for himself, and does in fact choose when things are presented for his acceptance or sympathy ; and for the use of the faculty which he thus exercises in receiving or rejecting, he is accountable to God ; but how could he be so accountable if he were the creature of circumstances ? But then what is to be said of those subtle influences which operate unconsciously ? Do not their effects prove that men are what circumstances make them ? Young children, whose characters are undeveloped, seem to be in some respects, to a very large extent, though not simply, what surroundings make them ; but when we consider the case of adults we find that another matter demands attention. The extent and the manner of the operation of moral influence on an individual must greatly depend on his own moral character ; and accordingly we find that the same influence produces at the same time different effects on different persons, as when the truth which comforted and emboldened St. Paul made unhappy Felix tremble.

It is assumed in the present argument that an influence may be unconsciously exercised ; and this probably

is at once believed by you all. But is it not quite as legitimate to assume that an influence may be unconsciously yielded to or resisted? It has been remarked that when John followed Peter into our Lord's sepulchre, he unconsciously yielded to an influence which had been unconsciously exercised upon him; and who can successfully oppose this view? "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." Accordingly when a Christian man of established virtue is under an evil influence that would lead him into sin, he naturally resists it. May not this be done unconsciously because of the natural antagonism of established holiness? On the other hand, a man in the natural sinful state resists in like manner a good influence which tends to help him to the way of virtue. In the one case the sympathy of the soul goes with good, and in the other with evil; and where is the difficulty of conceiving that when such is completely the case, there may be entire unconsciousness of what is taking place? But how does this conclusion help us? In this way: we see that the operation of circumstances depends on personal moral character, the antecedence and superiority of which to circumstances we very confidently assume. Then, man is not the creature of circumstances, but is, so far as he is the creature of anything but God, the creature, if I may so say, of his own will or choice, which determines the operation and influence of what comes upon him from without.

To one who has clearly apprehended that he is thus incessantly under the influence of others, it is most natural to desire that men always could and would do, in reference to himself, things calculated to promote

his welfare, or at least things not opposed thereto. He naturally wishes that all those who affect him should ardently long not only to do no harm, but also to promote much good, and that they should have such knowledge as would make them intellectually able to work out their longings into practice; for he knows that then the intellectual, the moral, and the outward modifications experienced by him as, in a sense, caused by the influences of others, would uniformly agree with his interest, and help to promote it. What right-minded man does not feel it most desirable that all the influences, whether known or unsuspected, that come upon him from without, should thus be of the right kind?

How painful it must be to such a man to find that in some case, or cases, an evil influence coming from without has been cherished by himself through ignorance, or want of circumspection, or of goodness. What can he do? He mourns over what has happened, and especially because men are capable of doing so much evil to one another; he is thankful that he has been led to see what has been done; he longs that the evil may be counteracted, and, if possible, overthrown; he anxiously labours for that end; and he resolves to guard himself better in the future, knowing that otherwise he may be deprived of much good, and brought seriously under the power of evil.

Much time has been spent in intense thought and ardent prayer for Divine help by persons in such circumstances, and some have gained thereby great advantage; but others have allowed their meditations to take a wrong turn, and to produce a wrong effect. Such has been the case with those who have determined, in the

sight of so great evil and so much danger, to retire from the world, in order to escape its contamination. For many reasons, this course is to be condemned. The manifest opposition of such a plan to the purpose of the Lord Jesus declared in Holy Scripture, suggests that it must work badly, if it does not entirely fail; and when the history of cloisters shall be known, it will tell that such has been the fact. The Lord Jesus has full knowledge of human nature; and He desires that His people should live in the world to shed light among its dreadful darkness, and to diminish the amount of its evil. He commands His people not to conceal their light, but to let it shine before men like a lamp in a room; and He says in His sacerdotal prayer, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Still, the reflections referred to, whatever may be their results in any particular case, are of great significance in connection with the subject of relationships; since they show how powerful may be the conviction in a person's mind, that the influence of others has done him harm.

But, on the other hand, how pleasant it must be to a right-minded man, who has duly considered the subject, when he finds that all the influences of others upon himself that he can trace, or at all suspects, have, during a certain period, been actually good, or at least not positively evil. He is thankful that there have been in the world such good desires, connected with so much knowledge of the way of doing good; and that others have produced, in respect of himself, changes promotive of his advantage. His thankfulness is by the operation of that sense of personal interest

which God has implanted in human nature as one of the laws of its existence. This sense of interest does not affect all in the same way ; because the views of men vary as to what real interest is. But we are now thinking of the right-minded man ; and what he is we all in a great degree know, for no man can be properly right-minded who has not come to entertain those views of life and its purpose which God has declared in the Bible, and which an attempt has been made in a preceding lecture to state. The man who esteems the improvement of his own personal character above worldly advantages of every kind, is proportionately thankful when he finds that he has been assisted by others in becoming less selfish, and more holy, happy, and useful. While some have their greatest joy over earthly good, he is gladdened most by that which is personal and moral and therefore eternal in its reach. Well may such a man have joy, when he finds that his good has been promoted by the influence of others ; for highly as he values that which he calls his good, he is aware that its real worth may immeasurably transcend his loftiest thoughts.

Such, then, appears to be the basis of our Saviour's argument and exhortation in the words which I have repeated. A man naturally desires his own good ; he is pained when the actions of other persons prevent its coming or bring its opposite ; and he is thankful and happy when his fellow-men cause it to come, or even refrain from that by which it is hindered.

The argument has been conducted hitherto with reference to the Christian or right-minded man ; but it can be drawn, with like force, from the feeling which the most

worldly men have as to personal interest, or that which they, often in grave error, deem to be their personal interest. They are pained when it is interfered with, and pleased when it is promoted by the action of others. All these thoughts are intended to aid you in understanding the real meaning of the statement, that society has an influence on all its members, and to lead you to feel as well as to see what is true concerning this side of the subject at present before us, namely, the relationships of this transitory life.

On the other side, let us consider that society is influenced by every one of its members. No one can live without doing something to others. The youngest members of a family have great influence on that family, and therefore on society. The addition of a babe to a household is an event marked by domestic changes, which can never be reversed after the new influence has once been fairly introduced and established; and as a child grows towards youth and manhood, the influence of his life is in respect to some things evermore increasing. When a new member is known to have come into a Church meeting or a club, the moral atmosphere of that meeting or club has been changed, and can never be again precisely what it was before. When in some occupation, or place of honour or of trust, one man has succeeded another, a change has occurred which must operate on the characters and conditions of those concerned. And what is here said of the influences accompanying and following the substitution of one person or thing for another, is equally true of the successions of things which make up the most ordinary or monotonous life. By them also society

may be affected in a degree much larger than we are apt to suppose. When all this is first revealed to a thoughtful youth, and he sees that he is an agent as well as an object in the activity and the influence of life, he has before his mind a powerful and deeply impressive fact, which continued thought only tends to make more and more affecting, so long as he does not, for his own relief or indulgence, perversely and sinfully depart from the sure landmarks of thought furnished in the Word of God.

We have already seen what principle ought to govern us in the relationships of life; and the observations just made suggest the question, What am I doing for my fellow-men? This question is of importance to every person, and brings to the mind thoughts calculated to check folly, and prompt to pray for God's promised help. Let us consider how this question can be answered by men of several classes.

The first class consists of those who know they have certainly failed to observe the Saviour's golden rule. If the truth had to be fully spoken, one of this class would make confession in some such terms as the following: "My life is not a blessing to men. I do not spread correct views of subjects, as to which such views are indispensable. The actions of those who follow my example are most certainly transgressions of God's law; and, if such persons have feelings at all pleasant, they must be self-deceived. Then who, of all men that recognise how I affect my fellows, can give me a blessing, or check the conviction that I deserve a curse, and that God would be just in taking vengeance upon me?" Though such a confession may seldom be made,

yet is it not truly descriptive of a common case ? and is not this case simply distressing, both as a matter of experience and as an object of contemplation, because of the self-condemnation of the person involved therein ; because of the disapproval of all right-minded men ; and because of God's displeasure which, though its manifestation be in mercy restrained in this probationary life, must ere long be more fully shown ?

The second class consists of those who are bound to regard their influence as an unsatisfactory mixture. One of this class, seeing and confessing the truth, would feel and say, "I have not properly observed the Saviour's golden rule ; and I am in doubt of the results of my conduct. I am afraid those whose characters I have modified are worse for it rather than better ; because, though I have said true and proper things, my life has shown observers that I have not done as I have said ; and, though I have given good advice, it has been seen that I have not overcome the difficulty of taking it myself. My life has been but a muddy stream, containing with some good things much that ought never to have been ; and such a mixture must be unsatisfactory both to men and to God, because it promotes mental conditions and outward actions adverse to the interests of the children of men." Such a confession as this may not often be made ; yet in the lips of how many who have good desires would it be perfectly consistent.

The third class consists of those who have with success endeavoured to observe the golden rule. The truth of the case of one belonging to this class would warrant the use of words like these : "I have had

before my mind the duty of doing to others as I would have others do to me; and it has been my constant aim to discharge this duty. So far as I can see, the mental states resulting from my influence must be correct and pleasant, and the actions to which they lead must agree with the law of God; and I am not aware that I have, during the period which I now survey, exerted any influence naturally and plainly calculated to do harm. I have spoken the truth in sincerity and love, and have striven to do as I have said. I have given such advice as I have believed to be good, and have endeavoured daily with some success to take my own counsel. Though I am sensible of many infirmities, I am also sure that the grace of God has enabled me to overcome some of those which belong to my fallen nature, and has wrought out for me a great deliverance. And now I can with confidence say to those whose eyes have been upon me, 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' and, 'Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ.''' For most evident reasons, such a confession as this can seldom, if ever, be made; but there have been Christians in whose mouths it would have been perfectly true.

Out of these distinctions there arises the question, To which class do I belong? and there can be no difficulty in finding the true answer. But it is possible for neither the question nor the answer to have its proper effect on the mind. Then, let us try to obviate an evil by attending to the thought, that every one is responsible to God in reference to others and for the influence which he exerts upon them. Personal conduct is properly, because Scripturally, represented as seed cast forth, as we pass

along in the course of life, into soil ready for its reception. The soil into which this seed falls and in which it grows are the minds, the hearts, and the lives of other persons. When a man takes this view of his life, how impressive and even awful must he find the fact that he is an accountable agent, living among those whom he inevitably affects in many ways, and in whom will appear results of his influence when the world has been destroyed! For, let it be borne in mind that no one can either call back or quite annihilate an influence which has once been given forth. It is true that it may be modified in its operation by other influences with which it has to mingle; but such modification cannot bring it to an end, any more than it can reverse the fact of its having begun to operate. Here, then, we have before us a most serious matter. Who but an utterly malicious man would start an engine along a thronged street, at the hazard of killing or injuring the passengers, if he knew he should not be able to stop it again? Who would kindle a fire in his house to-day if he knew, by Divine revelation, that it would never die out until it had destroyed the house, and done other damage? And who that is right-minded can put forth an influence that tends to destroy, knowing that such is its tendency, and that it can never be called back or entirely done away?

But some evidently take no such view of what they are or may be doing towards their fellow-men. If such views were, by some at present inconceivable miraculous Divine intervention, suddenly made universal, how great a change would be produced in religious, social, and commercial affairs; how many rash or idle words

would cease to be uttered; how many evil tempers would be no longer indulged; how many deeds would cause trembling alarm, when contemplated merely as possible, instead of being done with pleasure, as at present; how many parents would be driven to their knees in such prayer as they never yet offered, for such knowledge and such Divine help as they never yet ardently desired; how carefully would they labour so to impress their children, that they might grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; how zealous would men become to do one another good, and no harm; how honestly would business be transacted in all departments; how quickly would those departments, which are now thought necessarily to involve dishonesty, be abandoned or made to agree with the law of God; how great a change would take place in the current literature of a nation like this, and therefore how completely altered would be many walks of life, where even now it is clearly seen that vast improvement is required! Men would then begin to have thoughts of a perfect human society, and would be actually on the way for the attainment of that perfection which would include the absence of all harmful things, and the presence of all that is required to make life consistent with the will of God.

Great would be the happiness of living on earth after the attainment of such perfection, for every man would be a friend to every other, and the life of this lower world would be heavenly. History does not show that such a state has ever yet been attained; and facts occurring daily show that we are at present in a very different condition. Think of the state of things around us.

We observe great social evils in the different classes of society : words are daily uttered which, the speakers must know, cannot do the hearers good, and may do them much harm ; passions, which degrade their subjects, and tend to ruin the observers, are constantly at work among high and low ; deeds indicating great lack of self-government and fearful disregard of God's law, are habitually done by persons whose knowledge ought to make them ashamed of themselves and what they do ; many parents are allowing their children to become circumstanced according to the determination of events and surroundings which they, as the persons responsible, refuse or neglect to govern ; and the natural consequence is, that children are growing up in most deplorable ignorance and irreligion.

In commercial affairs treachery, dishonesty, and falsehood are alarmingly common ; unprincipled men, determined to be rich, are amassing wealth by fraud ; a leading feature in some trades is extortion ; and men can even try to excuse and justify such things because of competition, or the alleged impossibility of succeeding on any other conditions.

The literature of the country is in some departments an unhallowed thing ; genuine sympathising recognition of the truth concerning Christ and his religion is most unusual in many of the productions of the press ; and there are countless publications which do not in any way teach Christianity as to either doctrine or duty, but tend to depreciate our holy religion, and put into its place other things which cannot satisfy the needy hearts of men.

The administration of Church affairs also is greatly

affected by the influence of the principles of this world; and many things are done therein which cannot be acceptable to Him who is Head over all.

The modification of these evils in society, in commerce, in literature, and in the Churches, observable in this age, is according to the distinctive characteristics of the age. On this account some may be so deceived as to think that these things come naturally, and that the amount of evil belonging to them is but small; but this notion must not pass unchallenged, since many of the distinctive characteristics of the age may be peculiarly evil, or at least not positively good. But it is manifest that the things now described are evil, and that in all such evils the relationships of this transitory life are seriously abused; because in all such things the golden rule laid down by our Saviour is disobeyed. That cannot be good which contravenes a Divine rule; and that must abuse the relationships of this life which introduces among men things which it would be better for them never to have; which is certainly true of the things just described.

We have now considered this subject on both its sides, and have seen that every one is influenced by society, and in turn puts forth an influence upon his fellow-men. On the assumption of the correctness of the views presented, there appears to be great necessity for careful consideration of the relationships of life. Evil may be wrought through ignorance of relative duties; and there is much ignorance of this kind which devout and properly regulated thought would soon dispel; and when reflection, based on the teachings of Holy Scripture, has caused the truth on this subject

to be seen and felt, how, without disgust and shame, can such influences as those I have described be exercised in the affairs of men?

How common it is to hear persons confess they have gone wrong through ignorance; that if they had fortunately possessed at some previous time knowledge afterwards attained, certain things—over which they grieve—would not have been done by them, and certain other things would not have been neglected; and how painful must such reflections be to one who sees that his influence has injured others! Then how is the requisite knowledge to be acquired? The germs of all correct thinking on such subjects are contained in the Bible, to which, therefore, habitual reference ought to be made by those who desire that the amount of their ignorance may be diminished; and prayer should be made for the influence of that blessed Spirit, without whose aid the teaching of Holy Scripture cannot be properly apprehended. One who thus acts may learn much also from his own experience and observation; and no one who thus proceeds can long be in such ignorance of the relationships of life as we have been led to condemn.

But, while sufficient knowledge enables its possessor to see how the abuse of the relationships of life may be avoided, it is not of itself sufficient to secure this end. Facts plainly show that the clearest knowledge of duty does not necessarily lead to its being done; and even when there is not indicated the possession of full or satisfactory knowledge, the greatest desire to judge charitably cannot lead to the conclusion that the neglect of duty is accounted for and excused by

alleging ignorance. Doubtless, ignorance is very prevalent; but if all properly used the knowledge they possess, how different would the state of the world be from what it is at this day.

Then what is additionally required? Something that can do away man's reprehensible indisposition to discharge ascertained duty; and the seat of this something must be the conscience. Conscience is not naturally and necessarily a sure and certain guide. Indeed, a man may follow the dictates of his own conscience to endless perdition, as Saul of Tarsus conscientiously persecuted the Christians, thinking that he was in so doing rendering an acceptable service to Almighty God. Surely his conscience was at that time most miserably prejudiced and benighted; and yet he followed its dictates with all confidence. When conversion had brought his conscience into a state of purity and submissive obedience to the will of God, he still followed its dictates; but then he knew, instead of merely opining as before, that he was in fact acceptably serving God. A conscience Christianly enlightened and purified insures the constant operation of godly principles in all the departments of life. Under its direction a man acts, whether as husband, as parent, as neighbour, as tradesman, or in any other capacity, as he could not have acted in the darkness of the natural state. The Christian principle which governs him is such, that it naturally makes him unable to wrong his fellow-man. The fountain of action has been made good by the purifying operation of the new birth, and the fruit of the good tree is naturally good.

This is not disproved by the fact that some who

bear the Christian name transgress the Saviour's golden rule ; for they do so not as Christians, but because of their want of Christianity, and their sympathy with that which stands opposed thereto. The clearest knowledge of duty is comparatively powerless without this enlightened tenderness of conscience, which is the only thing that can properly direct a man in the discharge of duty, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and in the rigid avoidance of those things which do harm. How can a man, whom personal conversion has brought into full sympathy with the Lord Jesus, "go beyond or defraud his brother," or take in trade any unreasonable advantage of his necessity? The bare supposition of such a thing is simply absurd, for the two things are flat contradictions. The remark applies also to other abuses of the relationships of this life ; and the conclusion at which we therefore arrive is this, that personal conversion, issuing in established sympathy with the principles of Christianity and the mind of God therein declared, is indispensable to one who desires rightly to use the relations in which he stands to other persons. On what conditions this conversion depends we have already seen ; and the only additional reflection now called for is, that it is possible to all, and even enjoined upon them ; and since it is every man's duty to have that which precludes the abuse now under notice, such abuse cannot be in any instance either innocent or excusable ; and who that can persevere, in spite of this conviction, in practices which involve such abuse, can have either his own respect or that of any other?

Such conscientious action may involve what is, in

the estimation of worldly men, the foregoing of legitimate advantage. The coffers of some unchristian men may be filled, consistently with their characters, by dishonest trading; but this cannot be to one who is under the influence of the principles which I have endeavoured to describe; and some that take not Christian views of things, may conclude in their own minds that, to the Christian, conscience precludes what might just as well be possessed, and that a conscience is therefore a costly thing for a man to have. Absurd as this notion is in the just estimation of every Christian, it is practically carried out by many who desire to have the good opinion of fellow-men; but how can they have it when the real meaning of their procedure is properly understood? For such conduct means wilful rebellion against God, and wilful infliction of injury on the children of men.

These remarks have been made for the purpose of showing how the abuse of the relationships of this life may be avoided. They will also indicate the conditions of their right and profitable use. For if the knowledge of duty were universal, if conscience were duly enlightened and operative in every case, and if the law of God were constantly recognised and obeyed in men's conduct towards one another, all unrighteous advantage would gladly be foregone. Then all relationships would be channels of good, and men would greatly bless one another. This state of things is realised on a small scale in numerous godly families; but its opposite is presented to view in many more, and in other places. Let us be thankful for the good that is to be seen, remembering that, in proportion as the state of things

now indicated is approached or attained, the condition of the world is improved; and let us pray that the Holy Spirit of God may enlighten all minds, make all consciences Christianly tender, and cause to be shown in every life the fruits of personal goodness. But no one can acceptably offer this prayer to Almighty God, who does not consent to be thus savingly affected by the Spirit; and who can sincerely desire the answer to such a prayer on behalf of others, who is not willing to receive the same himself?

The conclusion, then, is this: that there is relative as well as personal necessity for full submission to the Divine will in the case of every man. He who does thus submit uses the relationships of this life with advantage to himself and to others; whereas he who does not cannot avoid their abuse. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." "The grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

My dear friends, you have requested me to inaugurate your Association,* by the delivery of an address; and I have thus complied. This being your time of inauguration, it is evident that your work is in the future. I hope you will have a history which it will

* The Claverton-street Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association.

give you pleasure to declare, and others to hear ; but I have not thought it wise to promise what will be done, lest, through unforeseen events, predictions should fail. I have preferred to confine my observations to what ought to be done, to the principles on which duty ought to be undertaken and discharged, and to the end at which you ought ever to aim. The general subject of which I have spoken has a specific illustration in a society which calls itself "A Mutual Improvement Association;" and I hope the interest shown in your beginning will continue long, and that you will be blessings to one another, and to many other persons. Remember the words of Jesus, which you have already heard, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Learn to differ in opinion, without being separated in affection. Sincerely, as gentlemen and as Christians, seek to be of service to one another. Let it never be said that you have failed through forgetfulness of the Saviour's golden rule. And may you prosper long.



VI.—TROUBLES.

MANY things remind of man's mortality and of the brevity of life. Yet these things are liable to be practically overlooked amidst the distractions of the present state; and doubtless there are many who never devoutly study this subject in its application to themselves. Yet it demands attention, and may be considered with the greatest advantage; and he is a benefactor who leads men to regard the thing in a proper way. In this respect meditation on the subject of this lecture may be helpful. This subject is—

The Troubles of This Transitory Life.

And our investigation may lead to the conviction that the very brevity of man's life on earth is one of the numerous proofs of the benevolence of God.

There is the highest authority for saying that man's life on earth is full of trouble. But how is this affirmation to be understood? The word trouble has a very extensive application. It means the greatest calamity, or its occasion; and it means also a trifling annoyance, or that by which it is caused. Between these two extremes there lie very many things in different degrees unpleasant, of which it is most properly used. It is here taken generally in application to those events and experiences which interfere with present comfort. The predication that "man is full of trouble," means, neither that he has nothing but trouble, nor that there

is in his life more of evil than of good, but that trouble attends him all his days, and acts with effect on his character and conduct. In every one and in every one's present circumstances and life there is something that is what it is, where it is, and as it is, because of the troubles which have gone before; though there may not often be power to ascribe the effect to its specific cause. Indeed, in human life causes are so mixed, and operations are so blended, that analyses of results are generally impossible.

The subject now introduced is so extensive and so diversified in its numerous parts, that it may be treated of in many various ways. To handle it wisely and well, requires much personal acquaintance with human nature, and a large experience; and this lecture may therefore betray to some incompetences of which I am quite unconscious. Still, since the ignorance standing in the way cannot be complete, though it may be large, an attempt must be made to supply this essential portion of the present discussion. Without ample reference to this topic, a treatise on our chosen subject would be inexcusably deficient, for the most patent and palpable reasons.

Troubles come to all in this transitory life. This is the well-known doctrine of Holy Scripture. There is a source of trouble in the nature of man itself. "*Man is born* unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." This seems to mean that trouble comes to all that are born. And who indeed is at all disposed to doubt the universality of tribulation? There is no one living whose present comfort has never been interfered with; and must not the same be true of every individual of each

succeeding age, from the beginning of the world? For the truth now before us it is not difficult to account, when we follow the leading of Holy Scripture. The human race is a fallen race; effects of the fall are found in every instance; and this is of itself sufficient to account for the fact of which we are now thinking. It is to us inconceivable that God could permit a fallen moral race to be unacquainted with trouble. Has not every human adult caused numerous troubles by wilful sin and by indiscretion, and found troubles naturally consequent on such infirmities as inevitably belong to a fallen creature? The breaking of God's law, which takes place in sin, cannot be without effect; it causes remorse, often indeed inconsiderable, but sometimes most intensely bitter; and then there is trouble enough. If a person indiscreetly does or says what it would be better not to do or to say, it is natural for the results which follow to be painful, when he sees how unwisely he has acted. And infirmity of body or of mind cannot fail to occasion at times such inconveniences as are troublesome. If these statements are correct, they show reason why each of us has personal troubles; and it is well known that troubles of this kind are often very numerous, and call for more human sympathy than they receive. Who has not been tempted to think that men kept from him in this respect what he could most properly claim?

There are also relative troubles. These also are very common. Every one has them in some way. One man has trouble in his family, because the health, the conduct, or the secular or spiritual affairs of some one of its members, are not such as can afford satisfaction, or

exclude alarm. Another has trouble among his friends, because they betray his confidence or falsify his hopes. Another has trouble in his business, because he has to deal with unprincipled men, or because some enterprise leads to disappointment. And another has trouble on account of Church matters, because some walk not virtuously, or fail to show adequate results of the efforts put forth upon them. How common are such experiences! Indeed, it sometimes happens that troubles of all these different kinds are upon the same individual at the same time.

In this matter, the testimony of experience is confirmed by what is everywhere presented to observation. Sometimes we can infallibly gather that persons are in trouble by simply watching their ways. Often the same inference can be drawn from looks. And how often do the words used to describe and characterise the subjects of common talk, convey the hint that those who employ them know at the time what it is to be in trouble.

If all the troubles felt on earth in one day were heaped on some creature able to bear them, and yet obliged to feel their full weight, how inconceivably dreadful would be his pangs, how distressing his utterance of pain, and how memorable to such a creature as man the sight of such a sufferer! It may not be equally impressive to think of the same amount of trouble diffused among all, when it is known that by all are meant many millions; but let us not forget that the total amount is as certainly felt as it would be in the case supposed. And is there not a proper sense in which it is just as painfully felt? The recollection of

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this may prompt us to pray, and may also help us to feel for those who need our sympathy. It is comforting to know that God sees it all, and is not an indifferent spectator; and some further use will be made of this fact in due time.

The troubles of this transitory life do not come with equal severity to all persons; nor are they equally severe to the same persons at different times. Some of them are properly called great troubles. These are such as fill the mind with the most engrossing thoughts, and cause the most overwhelming feelings of distress. Bereavement is such a trouble, when it means the loss of the creature most dear of all on earth. How often does death tear asunder persons knit together by love, and made one by the most tender sympathy, each of whom seemed to be, and actually was, indispensable to the complete happiness of the other. In such cases, even those who are blessed with the Christian hope weep and cannot refrain.

It is often a great trouble also, when parents are bereaved of their children, or children of their parents, and hopes long cherished and fed upon have to be utterly abandoned, with no prospect of substitution; as when an only child is laid in the grave by parents who have begun to bend beneath the weight of years. And bereavement sometimes takes place in circumstances which greatly aggravate the painfulness of its operation; as when, even in the case of a holy man or woman, life ends in some most dreadful way. How will some accepted servants of God, permitted thus to leave the world, hail the time when they can again hold happy fellowship with those to whom on earth

they caused life-long trouble; and how welcome will be the explanation which such an ability will involve; for it is an explanation sought in vain on earth.

There is great trouble in disappointment, when a man has cherished and pursued some project for years, and it utterly fails, and involves the hopeless waste of costly means, just when it ought to succeed. In this way, though perhaps chiefly by their own folly, some have been overtaken by commercial ruin. It is a great trouble also when failures of any kind, that are separately of comparatively little moment, come in succession, until an end is put to the disposition or even the power to make further efforts. The extent to which such failures can be borne, without this result, and without becoming really great troubles, may depend much on circumstances, and more on the temperament of the person disappointed, and more still on the spiritual state.

Ill-health often becomes a very great trouble, when it is continued through a series of years, and causes a species of the experience already described. It can sometimes be endured, with some complacency, for a short while, by persons to whom, when protracted, it becomes a very mournful and grievous burden.

There are many other great troubles. How many are those to whom God permits them to come, and to whom they are the most signal things in life; though it must be their own fault if life appears, even in such cases, to contain more of evil than of good. Such an appearance is probably never true in any case; although here may be some difficulty in persuading of this such as have very uncommon or specially great troubles.

And there are small troubles. These occur on all

hands and in engagements of all sorts, whenever trifling annoyances, or disappointments, or petty misunderstandings arise through infirmity, or haste, or the natural operation of the laws under which fallen beings in a world like this have to live. Such troubles are all that some persons have ever had. But under the head of small troubles come some difficulties that demand attention, and that without it must assume larger and more serious dimensions. This is the case when a slight misunderstanding is allowed to go on unsettled, until frequent reference to it has given it an adventitious significance which it ought never to have had. As a lucifer match or a spark may set a piece of wood on fire, and the burning wood may cause the conflagration of a house or a street; so a petty misunderstanding, not properly attended to, but allowed to grow by the fostering of thought and speech, may totally separate attached friends, or deprive a man of some valued commercial privilege, or spread fearful mischief in a Church. Who has not seen such things? "Behold, how great a matter, or wood, a little fire kindleth." "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention before it be meddled with." Who has not suffered through his own or some one else's neglect to follow the counsel thus given, in regard either to strife or some other difficulty or trouble in itself small?

There are also caprices of trouble. These are in cases in which troubles come unaccountably in groups or clusters. Think of the succession of distresses that came upon Job. Think of the experience which an English poet, apostrophising Death, thus describes:—

"Insatiate archer! Could not one suffice?

**Thy shaft flew thrice, and thrice my peace was slain;
And thrice, ere thrice yon moon had filled her horn."**

The same author says also, "Woes cluster; rare are solitary woes." A sad case of the kind is stated in the following description of known facts. A tradesman of feeble health was greatly cheered and benefited, because a good and dutiful son had become able to take an important part in his business; and he was indulging the hope of great relief and assistance and of years of happy life, when the object of his dependence was suddenly prostrated by disease, and quickly numbered with the dead. The loss so preyed on the troubled father, that his infirmities grew upon him; and he consequently had great suffering in mind and body. He was not only quite unable to attend to that which had previously been done for him, but was also daily watched by his family and friends, because they feared and trembled lest he should follow his son to the grave. What a series of troubles is there in such a case; and how great is the mystery in which such things are shut up. Yet how commonly does one trouble lead to others, both in things great and in things little. Who has not been filled with most perplexing thoughts by such things?

Attempts to account for such caprices of trouble, or for God's permission of them, must generally or always fail to give satisfaction. We cannot see the future; nor can we see the present as it is seen by God; and in proportion to our faith in His wisdom and goodness, must be our comfort amidst the unpleasant things of this life. Yet we can see a little; and a part of this little may be correctly seen. We all know, for instance,

that our habits and dispositions differ; and reflection on this point may yield instruction about the troubles of life. As we have to treat different children in various ways adapted to their peculiarities, so God may have to fit His discipline to our varied cases. Doubtless, some of us need such checking in certain respects as trouble most effectually brings about; and some need such enforced retirement and quiet as trouble sometimes causes men to seek. They need it, in order that they be able to get proper views of this world and its concerns, and of the other world and the present duties which relate thereto. Great troubles are seen to be the best in one case: in another the end can be answered by much less; and some must be baffled by a series or succession of evils, which to a pagan or an unbeliever might seem to result from the malignity of some higher power, or from the action of a 'dire but remorseless necessity. This view is not at all entertained by those who know God as He is revealed in Holy Scripture; though they also are sensible of the difficulties which cluster about the discipline of this life.

It is most comforting to be assured, on Divine authority, that troubles do not come by chance or blind necessity. There is an assignable cause. "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." God's eye is upon the troubled, whether they be evil or good; and it is not possible for their unpleasant experiences to be overlooked by the Infinite. That the troubles of the ungodly are regarded by God, is proved by the fact that they are threatened in His Word. "Many sorrows shall

be to the wicked." Psalm xxxii. 10. "Tribulation and anguish" are to come "upon every soul of man that doeth evil." Rom. ii. 9. The full execution of this threatening may be in the other world; and yet the principle certainly operates in the present state.

Troubles are represented as coming on the good only by Divine permission. Of this the case of Job is a remarkable illustration. The Lord permitted all that he had to be in the power of Satan. The consequence was that great and varied troubles were his lot. "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord: that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." To a Christian mind the thought is very prolific, that all the evils that come upon the saints are thus by Divine permission.

Troubles are referred to in the promises of Divine help. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: He is their strength in the time of trouble." "In the time of trouble, He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me." Besides, specific promises are recorded for those who discharge particular duties. "Blessed is the man that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon earth: and Thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."

To this Biblical representation of the thing let me

add a consistent word about the way in which troubles come. Are they not always to be referred to the operation of God's own laws? It has appeared that man has troubles because of the infirmities, diseases, and other evils which naturally attend a fallen moral creature who is mortal and "of few days;" but why is man mortal and of few days? Because he has broken the law of God. There is a law of disease as well as a law of health; and when the one law is broken, the other has to operate. This is true of moral as well as of natural things. That authority which the laws of God represent must ever remain; and when God's will is not done by His moral creatures in the way which He most desires, He must be glorified by having His will in some other way. Accordingly, when the conditions of bodily health are disregarded, it is lost, and disease takes its place. Then God's appointment is shown to be not ineffectual, and He is honoured. Thus the individual agent has to suffer for his own error. According to a similar principle, parents often bring troubles on their children, and persons less intimately related bring them on one another. Indeed, all the troubles of life are sufficiently accounted for on the ground that when law has been broken, less or more of the deserved consequence is inflicted or permitted by the God of love. In connection with this doctrine, let it be called to mind, that mercy characterises the government of a probationary world, and that what comes in consequence of transgression is immeasurably less than what is deserved. Then think of the greatest evils of this earthly life, and bear in mind that they are as nothing in comparison with what must follow, when the bene-

fits of Divine mercy shall have ceased to be possible. Oh, what troubles will eventually overwhelm the lost ! Who can think of them and not tremble at the view ?

Seeing, then, that God has regard for men in trouble, we ought never to despond or to be distressed on the purely imaginary ground of our being overlooked. We cannot be overlooked at any time in respect of anything. Whatever pain or sorrow we may have, whatever may aggravate the ordinary evils of the circumstances through which we have to pass, we have the happiness of knowing that there is ever on us a Mind which sees all that is, with a Heart that ever feels in the right degree and in the proper way. "God is love," and "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

God has a gracious design as to the troubles of this transitory life. The words just quoted must relate to troubles as well as anything else ; and they teach that the design of trouble is the sufferer's profit. The same doctrine is of frequent occurrence in the Word of God. To readers not ignorant of tribulation, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him : for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all

are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." These words are peculiarly instructive as to the subject now under notice; and God's design in trouble may be studied under their direction with special advantage.

We see here that trouble comes to the Christian in the way of Divine discipline. It is the Lord's own chastening or correction. Whenever there is a deep conviction of this, the operation of trouble on the mind must be greatly modified thereby. We are like children in our need of discipline, because we are evil and wayward, and have actually departed in transgression from the will of God. Accordingly, He brings the rod upon us, in order that we may taste but a little of the natural results of sin, and so be led to see, in part, what might be our portion, if mercy did not withhold from us much of what we deserve. This discipline is designed also to restrain us from proceeding further in the way of evil. Who that knows anything of the Christian life has not found great profit by means of such discipline? All this shows that God's permission of trouble is a part of the economy of grace of this life.

Yet even a deep conviction of its graciousness does

not make this discipline acceptable to human nature. It is still "not joyous, but grievous." That discipline which is indispensable to the welfare of a child is often much opposed to present feeling, and quite unsuited, in the child's own estimation, to promote that for which it is professedly designed. In some such cases the ignorance or the crying of the child, restrains the responsible person from administering the correction or reproof that is needed. This is not the excellent way. It differs much from that which the Lord takes in dealing with His children, and which is exemplified in St. Paul's experience of the thorn in the flesh. Though he earnestly prayed for its removal, yet, since the Lord knew better than His servant, the prayer of faith was not answered according to its terms. The daily grievous chastening continued; but the sufferer was blessed in such a manner that he could glory in his infirmity and tribulation; and he doubtless eventually felt that his trouble was the means by which came to him great and lasting good. Many Christians have attained like resignation amidst grievous trial. Such experience results from the operation of Divine grace.

Moreover, the Christian's grievous chastening is a Fatherly discipline. There is in this no contradiction or inconsistency of thought. Earthly parents, who naturally have the strongest love for their children, are the persons whom God has invested with that authority which involves correction as one of its duties; and he is unfit for the parental relation who does not correct his child, or who, when he corrects, does it not in love. Then what is true fatherly correction? It is a firm, jealous, and loving exercise of

the authority to rule by restraint. It is firm, because a wavering discipline might be equal to no discipline at all; it is jealous, because authority must be maintained for the preservation of the dignity and proper influence of the person invested with it, and for the good of those over whom it extends; and it is loving, because it is fatherly. Such certainly is the discipline which God exercises over His children, according to the doctrines and the examples of Holy Writ. How assuring and consolatory must the conviction of this be, amidst the trials which cannot be avoided! Yet how few even of those who know something of Christ are duly influenced by this conviction; and those who have it not, because they are ignorant of Christ, can have no comfort from reflection on the filial relation to God.

With what purpose, then, does our heavenly Father chasten or discipline His children? It is for their "profit." This might be inferred from what has just been considered; for God who is the Christian's Father, and is "love," must desire the good of His children. Every human parent worthy of the relation and the name has an intense desire to promote the welfare of his own; and we are taught by the Lord Jesus to judge of God's treatment of His children by the way in which such human parents act towards their offspring. "If ye then," says He, "being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good gifts to them that ask Him."

What then is that profit which God promotes in His children by the troubles or the discipline of life? It must be the profit of the whole man for all periods of

his existence. That cannot be the true human profit which affects only some parts of man's nature, or which relates only to the present state of existence; since man belongs to another world, and portions of his nature are not the whole man. God desires the present good of the body, which is often promoted by tribulation, as when a great shock of sorrow effectually determines a drunkard to reform. God desires the present good of the animal soul, the nexus in human nature of body and spirit; and this also can be promoted by trouble, as when the experienced painful results of defective self-government teach and urge a passionate man to rule himself better. He then avoids evil, and is in the way to gain positive enduring good. God desires the good of the spirit, the moral part of man; and this is often promoted by the discipline of trouble, as when disappointment or anxious concern leads to more prayer and stronger faith in Jesus Christ for acceptance with God and power to do His will. When this state has been attained, "the fruit of righteousness" has been yielded by tribulation; for conformity to the will of God has become the habit of the life. Then the sinner, graciously saved, has peace with God and with conscience, and, being a partaker of the holiness of God, is enabled to live in purity. He has also the testimony of his own conscience, that he does the will of God as that will has been apprehended by his own mind. Surely in such a case great profit has been gained. And this profit may last for ever.

The ultimate end of all this is "life." "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" The great thing of man's present

existence is life. Man eats that he may live, and works that he may eat; so that that "hunger" which causes the struggle for the means of continued existence "moves the world;" and all the activity that we witness among men means, with other things, a constant endeavour to have life, or more life. What will a man not give for life? So long as a man has life, you may do something for him or to him; but after death there is no such possibility; and this also shows that life is the great thing as to the present state of existence. The grand thing of man's whole existence is life, eternal life. Those who shall have it will be for ever supremely happy; but those who shall not have it will have misery which nothing else will ever be able to remove; and, as we have seen, they will have to look upon their existence as a failure. Therefore, incomparably valuable to man must be that which promotes the attaining of this eternal life. It appears that trouble is, to a certain extent, a thing which operates in this way. One who has attained the righteousness, the peace, and the holiness already described, is even now a subject of eternal life; for "he that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life." The change which his nature has undergone has prepared him for the service of God in heaven; and what he has now in the way of spiritual experience is not merely the germ, but rather the antepast of the consummate good of heaven; and trouble tends to make him determine to hold fast what he has. Thus we see that that profit which is promoted to the Christian by the tribulation of life, is the true profit

of the human being, having relation to all parts of man's nature, and all periods of his existence.

But this profit, let it be remembered, is not gained in every case as a matter of course, but is conditional. On what, then, does it depend? On submission to God. "Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" When a man does not submit to God in his troubles, he rebels against God; and then the good designed is prevented. This is most reasonable; and how amply is the fact confirmed by things of common observation. Impatience or unsubmitiveness in trouble often increases what is objectionable in personal character, when, if God's will were cordially accepted, the greatest improvement of character would be the result. It is a serious error to suppose that unsanctified trouble does good. Indeed the truth plainly lies on the opposite side. Who has not known men rendered peevish by such trouble? Then how can the necessary sanctification be realised? On condition of that submission to God which is faith, or the taking of Him at His word and will. This doctrine is most rational and consistent. Man must be willing to receive this gift of God before it can possibly be his. This doctrine has been fully revealed; and does it not commend itself to all? Then how strange and unreasonable is the conduct of those who repine because of unsanctified sorrow; how wise is he who seeks in prayer the consecration of the ills of life, for which we are taught in Holy Scripture to look; and how needful it is to persevere in prayer until this consecration has certainly been obtained.

Our impression of the wisdom of this course is deepened, when we think of the happiness of those who are thus resigned to the will and the appointment of God. This resignation does not end trouble or prevent its recurrence; and there is no intention or necessity that it should work in this way; but faith or submission to God is found to be the antidote to the distress caused by trouble. The man who, in spiritual conflicts, has full confidence in God, is like a ship in a storm *safely* anchored. The stress of circumstances is inevitably felt, and may cause great excitement; but the knowledge of safety and the feeling of present aid, cause an inward state which stands in grand contrast with the outward tempest. How is it that many, who are fully convinced of the attainability of all this, do not pant to realise it, and do not feel simply unable to rest in any other condition? Surely the evil of fallen human nature operates to a most serious degree in preventing actions of which conscience fully approves, and which are known to be pleasing to God. The man, who has become deeply convinced of sin, may well loathe himself and mourn; for he has been his own greatest enemy. Deep and bitter feeling of the ills of life, and want of comfort in trouble, are things for which no one need blame another, so long as he is himself unsubmissive to God. His own rebelliousness is a sufficient explanation. Let us, therefore, hear the counsel which David, after long personal experience, was directed by the Holy Spirit to give to those who fear God: "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give

thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord ; trust also in Him ; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day."

My young brethren, it is proper to conclude this address with the personal question, Are you sons of God? The consolatory views of trouble which I have presented, are for those who, having passed from death to life through faith in Christ, have experienced a new birth, which implies adoption into the family of God. We have been thinking of the discipline which trouble brings on the Christian ; and we have seen that trouble operates very differently on those who know not Christ. In the child of God affliction helps to work a fitness for an "eternal weight of glory;" but in the unconverted one it, being unsanctified, tends to deepen that evil of character which disqualifies for heaven, and makes existence a failure. Then accept on God's own terms the good He offers through Christ. You are in this asked to do the most worthy thing. The dignity that attends it is great indeed. There is nothing degrading in it. There is nothing in it that has the slightest tendency towards degradation. Men may tell you it is not so ; but history, observation, and experience corroborate the teaching of the Sacred Word, that so it is. Nothing ennobles and elevates the nature of man so much as the religion of Jesus Christ. This lecture is designed to show one of the ways in which this is brought about. When a man is a Christian, the relation in which he consciously stands to God invests his very afflictions with a grace that is not of earth. Then be Christians ; be sons of God ; and vast good

will come by means of the ills of life; for "unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." Troubles may grow, as a luxuriant crop, in the debased and degenerate soil of this world, and may utterly baffle those whose moral husbandry proceeds on principles that are not Christian. Their influence on the growth of life's good cannot be satisfactorily modified, much less can it be brought to an end by the application of pagan notions, or of that which science alone can supply, however modern, confident, and proud that boasting but most useful science may be. But the child of God has learned to delight to take another view, because he knows that there is another soil in which "light is sown for the righteous," whose minds the perplexities of this world often darken, another soil in which "gladness" is sown "for the upright in heart," who in this life often mourn, but whose mourning is coming to a perpetual end.



VII.—JOYS.

IN our last lecture we looked at man's earthly sojourn on its dark side. The impression which that view produced on the mind was not altogether unpleasant, as we found reasonable grounds of consolation for those who are in sorrow, and who are striving to please God. Let us now examine the opposite side of the same object. Let us consider

The Joys of This Transitory Life.

The legitimate mental result of this view will also be, like the other, a mixture. There will be something to excite pleasure, and something to moderate delight and prevent excess.

The impression produced by a contemplated object often greatly depends on the observer's point of view, and therefore on the aspect in which the object is presented. For example, a book on some particular subject may be regarded as ingenious and good by a person only partially acquainted with its theme, while the special intelligence of another makes it, in his just estimation, mediocre or even absurd. The one looks through the clear atmosphere of knowledge, but the other through the mist of ignorance. There is nothing wonderful in the difference of their impressions and conclusions. In fact, it is a thing unavoidable. Think of two men gazing on the same landscape in different

or opposite states of mind. It has, let us suppose, been familiar to them both for years, and is associated in their minds with some of the most memorable events of their lives. But the events have been different to the two men; and now the prospect is full to the one of mementos of past calamity, but suggests to the other thoughts of successful effort there put forth, or of some great personal or relative good there gained. Thus the same things, seen from the same place, at the same time, naturally cause in two persons the most diverse effects. In this way the same truth that comforts and emboldens a holy and self-denying Christian makes the sinful and unhappy worldling tremble.

The following story, whether legendary or true, may illustrate this thought. In North Wales there is a mountain the name of which means "hill of sorrow." It looks over the sea into which "Conway's foaming flood" is poured. Its name is accounted for in the following way. In the vale below, when it was a vale, and not a sea, was the home of a man whom duty daily called to leave his wife and children, while he went over the hills to earn them bread. Regularly at night-fall he returned to the bosom of his family by the mountain path. Day by day from the summit of the hill, to which his calamity was destined to give an abiding name, he looked down with delight on the place where his dear ones lived and longed for his return. But, alas! a day arrived when the mountain prospect broke his heart. It was a day of strange floods and tempestuous tides. The waves rose to a height no one had ever known before. They quickly surrounded the happy home. They threatened to fill

the house. They crossed the threshold, and fulfilled their threat, while the protector of the despairing household was far away. And they swept away the whole fabric and those who dwelt therein. The good man came at the accustomed time to the top of the hill to look down, not upon the home where he had left all that he held dear, but upon a boisterous sea whose waters rolled as if in rage over all that he had hoped to behold. And he and men of all succeeding generations called that mountain "the hill of sorrow." How sharp the grief with which that man must have gazed both then and ever after on that expanse of water! Contrast the pleasure which that prospect yields the intelligent tourist that has an eye for nature's beauties. Yet the objects seen would be the same to both.

We have been looking on earthly life with reference to the griefs and sorrows with which it teems. We have seen that this world is with reason called "a vale of tears;" and we need not forget this fact, while we now attend to other facts of a very different kind. We are studying this transitory life. To a man whose trials have been specially severe, this study may be most depressing. This may be peculiarly the case when the consolations, of which I spoke in the last lecture, are not sought and found. But to a man whose wants have always been supplied, whose difficulties have been light, and whose experience has been comparatively short, life may seem to be little but a thing of gladness; and to him the contemplation of this transitory life from his own stand-point may be a most agreeable exercise. In the lecture on troubles, we saw that reference to the provisions of Divine grace ought to

prevent despair; and in the present address it will appear that the joys of this life are not to be regarded with feelings of simple delight and satisfaction.

In this world there is much over which it is natural to rejoice; but there are some that seem not to have much natural joy. Occasionally a person is met with who is ready to affirm that there remains to him no proper occasion of joy. Such a thought is worth looking at. What must a man's condition be when such a description of it is correct? When in this world would it be true of a man that he had nothing over which he could properly rejoice? Would it be when he had lost every friend by death? But he would still live himself, and might find new friends, who would in a manner take the places of those who had gone. Would it be when successive schemes and projects in commerce, in literature, or in something else, had failed, and the failures had thrown him back again almost to his beginning? But he would have his powers remaining, and might even yet succeed. Then hope would foster joy; and he might ask in the words of the prophet, "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" Would it be when he had lost all his worldly property, through his own error, or through the perfidy or dishonesty of other men? But he would still be himself, and might rejoice in the conviction that a man is more than any possessions, and that the losing of goods may promote the saving of the soul. Would it be when he had lost his health, and disease had begun to make his end seem near? Even then there would remain all the philosophical and Christian principles that have caused some men to rejoice more in sickness than in health, on the ground

that affliction, received and endured aright, improves the character, and meetens for a better world. Men who constantly oppose the known will of God may come to despair. They may be in conditions of which joy is not properly an element. But how can we be led to anything like the conclusion, that one who devoutly serves God, and seeks His constant guidance, can be brought by Divine providence to an utterly joyless condition? The patriarch Job had very great afflictions, and was hardly comforted by his friends, or by any earthly thing; and yet the reader of the book which relates his case feels that, after all, the man had a taste of sweetest joy when things were at their bitterest.

There are many occasions of joy. There is the joy of deliverance. When evil is present or impending, painful emotion cannot be avoided. The longer the evil continues, the more defined the uneasiness which it occasions may become. Pleasurable emotion must in such a case attend escape from the evil. This joy is experienced by a man recovering from a sickness which threatened death; by a person rescued from shipwreck and the vision of a watery grave; by one who comes unhurt out of a railway collision; or by a man who fears commercial ruin from an imminent crash, and then finds his fears are groundless. Whether men so circumstanced give thanks to Almighty God, or take all honour to themselves, they certainly have joy.

There is the joy of success. Think of a man with some weighty matter on hand, the issue of which, though of great moment, is quite uncertain. He may be full of hope, but cannot easily be free from anxiety. His concern may indeed be a very heavy trial to him.

Contrast with this state of mind that into which he enters when there comes the assurance of success. This agreeable transition may be experienced by bad men in regard to evil things, as well as by good men in regard to good things. This is the joy felt by kings and kingdoms when mighty enemies have been vanquished; and by diplomatists, scientific discoverers, men of business, authors, and workers for Christ, when their most cherished hopes have been accomplished. What had Newton when mathematical demonstration proved he had discovered the law of gravitation? The joy of success. What had Franklin when a spark showed the correctness of his thought about the thunder-cloud? The joy of success. What had Mrs. Stowe when the civilised world was reading "Uncle Tom's Cabin?" The joy of success. What had George Stephenson when he saw the growing fulfilment of his prediction, that England would become a network of railways? The joy of success. What is experienced by students at the overcoming of formidable difficulties, by teachers when pupils bring them honour, by missionaries when they can speak in new languages, and when the heathen are brought to know Christ? The joy of success. Who has not known such success in things personal or relative, and great or small? How large a portion of the total amount of earth's enjoyments comes to man in this way.

There is the joy of possession. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Yet if there is to be comfort, there must be possession. The universal conviction is, that he who has nothing is to be pitied for his want. The man who has mastered

a new branch of science or a new language, has the joy of possessing what he has acquired. The joy of possession comes to him whom industry or "fortune" has made rich; to him whose care has collected about him the things which meet his taste for literature, or objects of art, or scientific experiment; to him who "has his reward" for self-glorification, or for the pursuit of fame or of power over men; to the man who has wooed and won and taken to himself the object of his affection and choice; and to other men in other ways. Men's possessions are often more regarded than the men themselves. They often make their happiness dependent on them. Observers often make the same mistake. All this shows that the joy of possession is a great thing in the present world, to those who look not to the Divine "recompense of reward," and who have not learned "to endure as seeing Him who is invisible." What would such persons be without possessions and with hearts unchanged? The Lord says, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also;" and it is according to human nature that, when the heart's affection has been fixed in a certain direction, the treasure which is to satisfy should there be sought. Where the possession is a wrong thing, the joy which it occasions cannot be right. Let this act as a warning to those whom it may concern.

There is the joy of hope. Hope is a reasonable expectation of what is desirable. When a thing is desirable, but there is no reason to expect it, it is not hoped for; and when a thing is expected, but there is nothing to make it desirable, it is not hoped for; but when desire and expectation unite, the union is what

we know as hope. This word hope, like many more, is often misapplied. There are "false hopes." They are things falsely called by the name of hopes, some related facts being either unknown or unconsidered. "The hypocrite's hope shall perish." But let us take the word in its general and somewhat loose sense, and then think of the joy of hope. A man who has had some signal deliverance, or has achieved some gratifying success, and who now possesses what has thus come to him, would have little enjoyment without a prospect of a continuance of his good. Hope plays an important part in human life. It sustains the man who longs for deliverance from present evil or inconvenience. It energises one under the pressure of difficulties, on the overcoming of which success is known to hang. It inspires the poor, rich in mental force, with the vision of respect and influence, and thereby urges to energetic action. When the astronomer Ferguson was a poor boy, and lay on his back on the ground by night, to study the motions of the stars, with the aid of an apparatus devised by himself, he had the joy of hope, with all his other joys, whatever they might be; and the joy of hope had given place to the joy of possession, when his attainments had begun to be recognised by inquirers after knowledge, by men of high scientific attainments, and even by the Sovereign of his country, when he had received the Fellowship of the Royal Society, and when his printed books had taken a chief place among the teachers of the sublime facts of science. His enjoyments were probably as great and as satisfying when their fountain was hope, as when they sprung from actual possession. Illustrations of this kind are

very abundant in all departments of life. Every man can find apt and probably most forcible illustrations in his own life; for it is true that "hope springs eternal in the human breast." When all other lights have gone out, or such is the appearance, this casts a ray, though it may be feeble and solitary, upon the surrounding gloom. There is no condition in this world that is absolutely hopeless to the man who has faith in God. The bud of his hope may not be permitted to open in the present life. Such a thing has sometimes been known. But then it will bloom in unanticipated and surpassing beauty in another state. And so long as a man has hope he must have joy in some degree.

Some of this life's joys are personal, and some are mutual or relative. These different kinds run together, and very clear distinctions may be difficult. When parents rejoice that their children's wants are supplied, or that a prodigal has been reclaimed, or that a son has come to usefulness or honour, is their joy personal or relative, or of both kinds? They rejoice in their own happiness, as well as in the happiness of their children; and perhaps their joy is as much personal as relative. The same view is correctly taken of the joys of an evangelist, and those whom he is honoured to lead to Christ; of the joys of a tutor and his successful pupils; and of the joys of a philanthropic inventor who has brought into use what has lessened the amount of human pain, and those who reap the benefit. Is not relative joy a more delightful thing than what is purely personal? Personal joy may be so degraded as to join hands with selfishness, be wedded to it, and become one with it; but joy over another tends to draw out

affection, and to make its subject less selfish, by reason of sympathy and a longing to help to perpetuate the good which is surveyed. In personal joy you drain the cup yourself; but in joy that is mutual another drinks with you, and the communion may be a refreshing repast to both, and the fountain of a stream of charities which will flow as long as life itself shall continue. Personal joy is a good thing, but joy which can be shared with another is a better. "Covet earnestly the best gifts."

Some of life's joys come with an admixture of sorrow, or other unpleasant ingredient. Such are the joys of a poor wife over the first signs of reformation in her intemperate husband; of a man recovering from an illness which he believes to have permanently injured his constitution; of a person acquitted of a calumnious charge, of which he can never think without disgust or a shudder; and of one who has gained a purpose at a cost of money, or time, or health, which he could scarcely bear. Indeed, is not this mark or quality found in all joys that are not purely spiritual and Divine? How can man attain in this life a condition in which he meets with no occasion of regret? This aspect of life's joys may help us to understand their moral purpose. There are joys so great and absorbing, that in their midst all grief and unpleasantness are for the time forgotten. Such might be the joy of a mother surprised by the return of a son, of whom she had not heard for many years, or of a man who should suddenly come upon a grand scientific discovery or some vast treasure. But even in such instances the sense of perfect satisfaction would quickly pass away; and the

consequent depression would probably be in something like proportion to the antecedent exultation.

There are joys which ought not to be. When clever wickedness brings a man some decided temporal advantage, and he rejoices; when an evil purpose has been accomplished by over-reaching or intrigue, and congratulation follows; or when an unspiritual and unchristian son is acquitting himself with great honour at College, though acquiring that which will prepare him to do great mischief, and which may end in deep damnation, and his parents overflow with joyous pride; is there not a joy which is false, which ought not to be, and which could not be, if all the bearings of the case were seen and duly considered? Joy over iniquity is a thing that must have an end. It will come to an end as surely as a pyramid of ice set up in winter in Hyde Park must disappear before the end of summer; and for a like reason, namely, because its continuance is against the established and unchanging laws of the universe. Yet rejoicing over iniquity is a common thing. Give not yourselves to it, lest you be ensnared and brought to ruin and rayless despair.

There are potential joys which are never allowed to become actual. Indeed, some mourn when they ought to rejoice. This is the error of one who persists, in spite of everything, in seeing little or nothing but gloom and discouragement in the facts and the prospects of his life. We have already seen that there is a mistake in supposing that life is nothing but a vale of tears, and that it is extremely difficult to imagine an earthly condition in which a rational and benevolent man could find no proper ground for joy. Indeed, the

grounds for joy are so many, that he who has no positive joy unwisely allows the pleasant potentialities of his life to be undeveloped. The error under notice is perpetrated by one who fosters the notions, that no one cares for him, that his path through life is peculiarly disagreeable, and that men withhold from him the very things on which his comfort necessarily depends. Such a man ought to learn that it is his privilege to rejoice in God at all times, to glory even in tribulation, and to find comfort in the innumerable mercies of God, even if all men should frown and hate. But where have all men at once frowned upon an individual and hated him? He that sincerely wishes to befriend may expect to be befriended, because his wish will lead to actions that will be reciprocated. Then let the faculties be reasonably exercised, and there must be joy. But who can say that he has realised all the joy manifestly designed for him? If God's will were universally complied with, men would have a little heaven on earth. He invites all to that communion with Himself which is realised through Christ, by the gracious working of the Holy Ghost, and which brings to those who experience it an inexpressible delight, of which men of the world know nothing. We have already seen why this good is not found and held fast by all. At present I hold up before you a view of your great privilege, and say, Come to the feast and be satisfied. "Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice."

Into such classes, then, may the joys of this life be divided. I might have carried the classification much further. What has been done may suffice for the present purpose. And what is the moral of all this?

When I survey the whole subject as thus briefly and with many omissions sketched in outline, how am I to think of it? It is evident that the joys of life are a part of its discipline, and that it may be as difficult to make the right use of them as it is to get out of troubles the good which they are intended to yield. From this it follows that joy is not altogether joyful, as trouble is not altogether troublesome. Each of them is mingled with something that comes from the other. This compensation or balancing in the experiences of life is commonly observed, and indicates the design of God. What purpose may it be intended to accomplish?

The joys of this life, not mitigated and directed by true religion, tend to do men harm. They may so engage attention as to shut out of view more important things. Think of a man who has achieved certain and permanent success in some secular pursuit. No one shares his honours with him, because his success has been personal, and may appear to have been gained by his own right hand. None can take his honours from him, because they have become historic facts. The joy of success may be to such a man too absorbing. This will most probably be its character in the absence of deep religious convictions, or of some unpleasant experience that naturally moderates the amount of joy. Think, for instance, of a scientific discoverer who sees his work recognised by all competent men, and his name honoured in every civilised land. Think of a man of business who once knew poverty or its next door neighbour, but who has now made himself rich and powerful by successful trading. Think of an author, over the appearance of whose successive books

there seems to rise a tempest of applause. And think of your popular men, whether in the pulpit, in the senate, or elsewhere. If such men really know human nature, and have due concern to accomplish life's end, they see themselves in great danger of losing sight of the real and permanent, while they fill their vision with that which is shadowy and transient. If such men have not the knowledge and the concern referred to, then it is a great mercy when reverses enforce attention to the stern realities of being; and how often is sorrow the lot of those whom spectators are apt to deem supremely happy. When we reflect on the goodness of God, we see that it is of itself sufficient to account for all this. God is not willing that His children on earth should surfeit through excess of temporal good, without many and repeated warnings of dangers and intimations of the unchanging desire of the Sovereign under whom they live now, and must live even after they have departed hence. He checks and bridles the steed that would otherwise run, in his own imagined all-sufficiency, to ruin. How many of His children can testify that they have been so treated, and have been blessed by the treatment, painful though it was. Probably at the time they could discover no sufficient reason for the quenching of the fires of joy; but at length the manifested wisdom of God struck a chord in their own minds, made wise and sympathetic by the schooling of experience.

But in the absence of such reverses, and in the midst of an uninterrupted succession of earthly joys, how perilous would a man's position be! Indeed, what would that condition be which all men duly informed

would consider the most perilous of all that man could know on earth? Would it not be the state of excessive joy, rather than that of excessive trouble? If it is not impossible, try to imagine the case of a man living on earth a stranger to earthly sorrow. All his schemes have prospered; all his wants have been met; all his desires have been anticipated; and the whole world has appeared to smile upon him, appears to smile upon him still, and promises to smile to the end. Is it credible that such a man, in a world like this, would or could have proper views of himself, of God, or of things? Could he accomplish the purpose of life? Could he have such regard and sympathy for men as they need? Could he acquire that character of passive self-sacrificing obedience, which is a characteristic of the Christian life, and which is represented as being a thing essential to meetness for heaven? Would he not rather become gradually but surely selfish, then supremely selfish, and then at last utterly miserable, being eaten up by the evil fire of self-indulgence? How evident it becomes that unmingled earthly good would be as difficult to manage as the troubles which are now the common lot.

Indeed, does there not come with all earth's joys a movement or element which tends to harm? What earthly joy is there which does not in some degree incline man to enter into an improper relation to creatures? Some that have earthly joy, seeing how great a power the creature has to comfort, seek satisfaction from the things of this world, and so give themselves up to the enjoyment of all that the world can yield them; others have to confess that the

increasing of their worldly good and consequent joy has interfered with their devout recollections of Divine and eternal things; and many who make no such confessions, and who may have no consciousness of these things, certainly have suffered in the same way. When earthly things are improperly clung to, harm must come; and is it not natural to man to cling to that which yields him present good of any kind? Then how manifest and how great is that Divine mercy which mingles the experiences of life, moderating joy with sorrow, as well as sorrow with joy; and how wise is the prayer of Agur: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal and take the name of my God in vain." The principle of this prayer may be extensively applied.

But when joy does come, how ought it to be managed, that the good it is capable of yielding may be gained and kept? This question conducts us to another side of our subject, a side on which possibly some may see but little difficulty. We have seen one of the natural tendencies of earthly joys. If a sailor, who can blaspheme in calm seas, weeps and prays in storms, and at the prospect of death; if a man, who trusts in himself in success, feels he must depend on God in adversity; and if it follows that piety is commonly more promoted by earthly sorrows than by the joys of the world, is there not still a possibility that the joys of which I speak may be made helpful to man in relation to the highest and best things? If it is so, how can this possible thing be made actual? In

answering this question, reference may be made to three things—namely, gratitude to God, benevolence towards men, and the right appreciation of the promises recorded in the Word of God.

When the joys of this world are answering their purpose, they promote true gratitude to God. What naturally follows such gratitude? The man who feels it devotes himself to the Divine pleasure; the selfish tendencies of his fallen nature are effectually withstood; and his service of praise and of loving self-surrender is accepted by God. It is manifest that that which thus operates must do him good. Gratitude may be professed when it does not truly exist. Then the effects described are not to be expected. Where the professed gratitude is genuine and deep, there will be the cultivation of the habit of piety and of worship; but all this is prevented by the spirit which prompted Nebuchadnezzar when, surveying the things over which he rejoiced, he said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?" How great would be the blessing gained by man, if God were duly regarded in every occasion of joy! Since no day is, in ordinary cases, without something that should occasion joy and thanksgiving, songs of praise might then be heard on every hand from every lip; earth would become the home of heavenly things; and men would antedate the glories of the better world. May our joys ever cause this gratitude to God. It would not only improve character, but also make joy more joyful.

When the joys of this life are answering their purpose, they promote true benevolence towards men. The man who feels proper gratitude to God, desires to

give it practical expression ; but his goodness cannot reach Jehovah. Then what is he to do ? He longs to do good to men. He considers that he has what many have not, and he desires to help to supply their wants, in proof of the gratitude which he feels towards God. His sense of obligation to God is constant and very deep ; the peculiarity of his enjoyments is unknown to many men ; and these two reasons urge him to seek their good. The thought which influences such a man is like this : " Much good has been bestowed on me. God demands that the gifts He has bestowed be properly used. If I so use them as to benefit men, I shall imitate Himself. While I rejoice, many sorrow. If they had my occasions of joy, how could they sorrow ? Then let me try to show them by some means that there are, even in their lots, things which ought to cause them joy." Very different from this are the thought and the conduct of a man who selfishly keeps all his good to himself. He could cheer and comfort the poor by munificence if he would ; but he keeps all his money. He could help the perplexed by sympathy and advice if he would ; but he disregards their cries, or the facts which must in effect cry for help in the observer's ear. The joys of such a man do harm, for the reason previously considered. He uses that which has been lent him as if it were his own ; in so doing he abuses it ; and in abusing it, he abuses himself and his own powers. Imagine, on the other hand, the good which men would obtain and diffuse, if they allowed their earthly joys to make them benevolent to men.

When the joys of this world are answering their purpose, they promote correct appreciation of God's

promises of future good. The enjoyable things of this life, the promises of heavenly good, and the actual enjoyments of the sainted in heaven, all proceed from the same God of love. He never changes, and never can change. Therefore His treatment of His children on earth may, when duly studied, be helpful to those who wish to understand what He has said of the future glory. Is it impossible for one of His children to be in such a condition in this world, as to have no occasion of joy? Then how many and how great must be the occasions of joy in that world where trials and pains will have no place, where every inhabitant will have been delivered from all evil, will have the delight arising from the known and irreversible accomplishment of life's purpose, and will possess the treasures of heaven itself! All the good of earth comes to man for the sake of Christ. Some do not recognise this; but it is recognised by him whose gratitude to God and benevolence towards men are what they ought to be. Such a one naturally meditates in a manner like this: "I have much good in 'this vale of tears.' Then what shall I have in that land where the inhabitant will never say, 'I am sick?' My enjoyments are greatly limited here by the conditions of the body, and the evils which affect society; and yet my joys are really great; then what must they be when nothing shall hinder the full development of all my powers, or the entire satisfaction of all my desires? If all that I now have can come to me through Christ in the fallen world, what may not come to me through Him in the world where sin cannot be?" In this, as well as in many other ways, earth may be made "a scale to heaven;" and one who

thus meditates is weaned from dependence on earthly things; his affection is set on the higher good of the world described in Divine promises, and seen by the eye of faith; and the more he has of the joys of earth, the more he admires the love of God, and the more ardently he anticipates the bliss to which he tends. Thus St. Paul, while he greatly rejoiced in serving the Lord in this sorrowful world, was in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which he knew would be far better than any condition attainable on earth. O that the joys of this life always promoted such appreciation of the promises of God!

I take the purpose of these joys to be the production of the three effects described. When these effects are produced, man's true good is promoted. To those who stand in the right relation to God "all things work together for good." The good is that which has been indicated, and the possession of which is essential to man's eternal welfare. Every enlightened and thoughtful person who thus understands the thing will know how to pray about the joys of this life.

The manifold conclusion of the matter is this, that our characters are tried by joys as well as by sorrows; that joys call for Divine help shown in distinct and peculiar ways; that more have probably been ruined by joys, of the number and excess of which none ever complained, than by the troubles of which all complain; and that those need not mourn whose earthly joys appear to be comparatively few, since their present trials are less severe, and God bids them welcome on reasonable conditions to joys which will never end. The different parts of this conclusion will not equally

affect you all; but you are entreated to strive to understand the subject as it applies to yourselves.

From what has already been said in this course of lectures, you know on what principles to proceed in seeking to understand the matter. I need not now point them out again. This would be to repeat what you have not yet, I trust, forgotten, and will not, I hope, forget in coming days. Then practise what you have learned, whether here or elsewhere; let not your correct views be contradicted by the actions of daily life; and may you follow this counsel whether you be in sorrow or in joy. Then both trouble and joy will promote in you the character which pleases God; both will help to prepare you for the life and service of the heavenly world; and you will have to give thanks to God for both to all eternity. But if the discipline appointed you by God be not allowed by you to produce its intended results, you will have had all your joys in the moment of earthly life. And what am I to think of such a fact seen and felt for ever?

Thus have I told you my thoughts about *This Transitory Life*. We have reviewed together man's brief stay on the earth; the Divine purpose as to that stay; the conditions, the method, and the consequences of the fulfilment of that purpose; its possible dreadful failure, with the results thereof; the relationships of the sojourners; their troubles; and their joys. This effort, such as it is, is now complete. To the younger and less mentally furnished among you, it may have

brought some fresh thought, that will, I trust, help them to obtain correct conceptions of the present life; to the rest of you it may have been sufficient at least to remind of certain familiar things, which are much in danger of being overlooked; and to myself it has been a thing of pleasure. I intend in due time to commit these lectures to the press, in the hope that other young persons, circumstanced much as you are, may find some little help to their life-work from the perusal. What views ought a man now to have of life? Those which are most nearly the views which he will have in the light of the eternal world. Many long now to have those views; and many more would so long, if they once clearly saw the truth concerning the things of which I have spoken. Keeping this in mind, I have striven to speak according to the oracles of God, in which the Divine voice utters to us eternal truth. I have longed to be of use to some thoughtful, wondering, and anxious youth, whom I have seemed to hear praying to Almighty God in the following words of John Foster:—

“Give me all that is necessary to make me, in the greatest practicable degree, happy and useful. I feel myself so remote from Thee, Thou Grand Centre, and so torpid! It is as if those qualities were extinct in my soul which could make it susceptible of Thy Divine attraction. But oh! Thine energy can reach me even here. Attract me, Thou Great Being, within the sphere of Thy glorious light; attract me within the view of Thy throne; attract me into the full emanation of Thy mercies; attract me within the sphere of Thy sacred Spirit's most potent influences. I thank Thee

for the promise and the prospect of an endless life; I hope to enjoy it amid the 'eternal splendours' of Thy presence, O Jehovah! I thank Thee for this introductory stage, so remarkably separated by that thick-shaded frontier of Death, which I see yonder, from the amplitude of existence. But oh! how shall I occupy the space of this stage, so as most *absolutely* to achieve its capital purpose,—so as to take possession of what, in Heaven's judgment, is its *utmost value*? Oh do Thou seize my existence at its present point, and henceforward guide and model it Thyself!—Images of excellence, of happiness, of real greatness, often appear to me, and look at me with an aspect inexpressibly ardent and emphatic. Monitors, why do you accuse me? whither would you lead me? Yes, I will follow them, and try what is that scene to which they invite me. Oh my Father! give me Thy strength; inspire, conduct, and crown one of the unworthiest of all Thy sons."

May he who speaks, and you who hear, and they who read, have such resolves, and carry them out in action, and dwell at last in "the eternal splendours" of Jehovah's presence!

IN every true believer
The Lord Himself reveals,
Baffles the arch-deceiver,
A blessed life conceals,
And works in ways of various grace,
To fit him for the holy place.

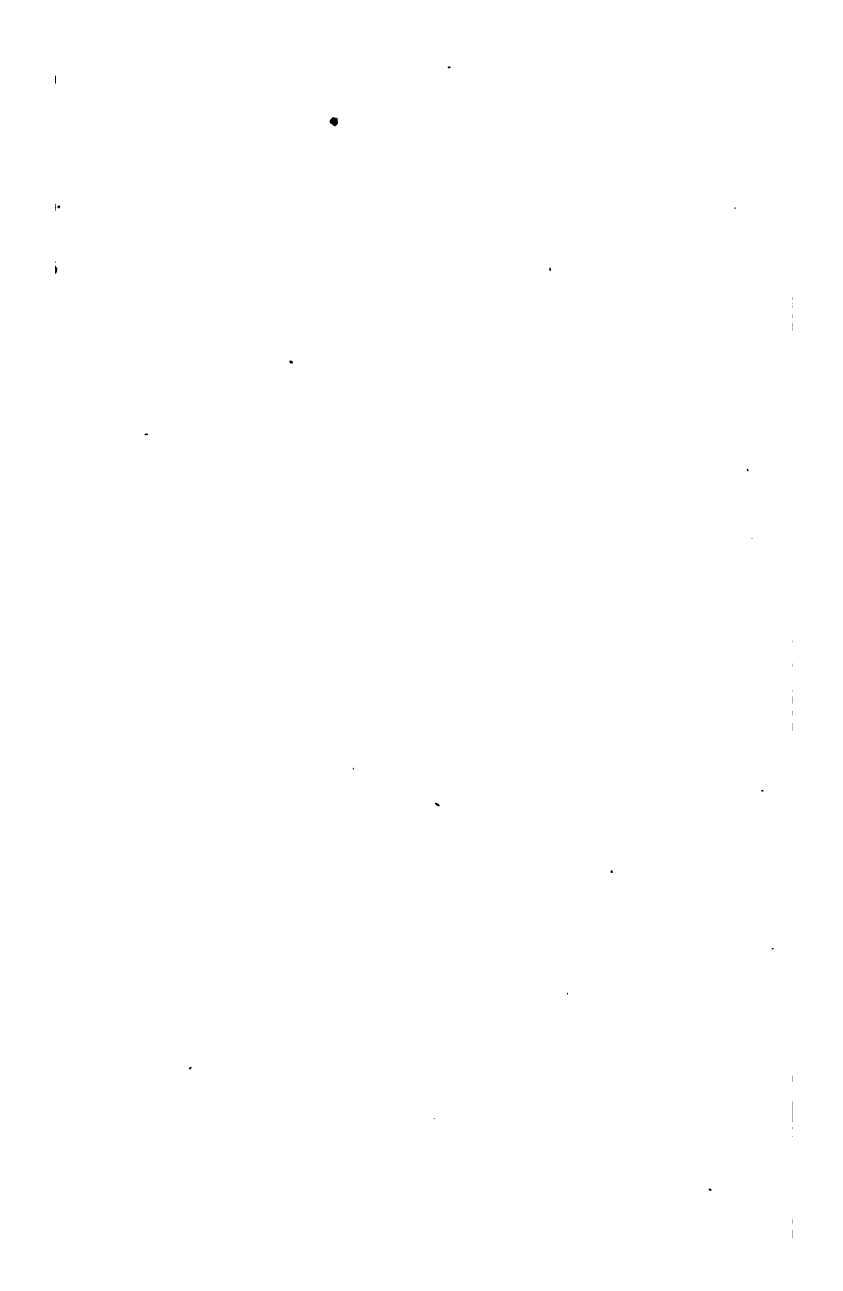
His eye is on him ever,
And for him yearns His heart;
He, present to deliver,
Will make his foes depart,
And to the feast of endless love
Conduct him in the courts above.

In times of tribulation,
When sorrow bears him down,—
With inward consolation
To worldly men unknown
The Lord is with him e'er to bless,
And mitigate his sore distress.

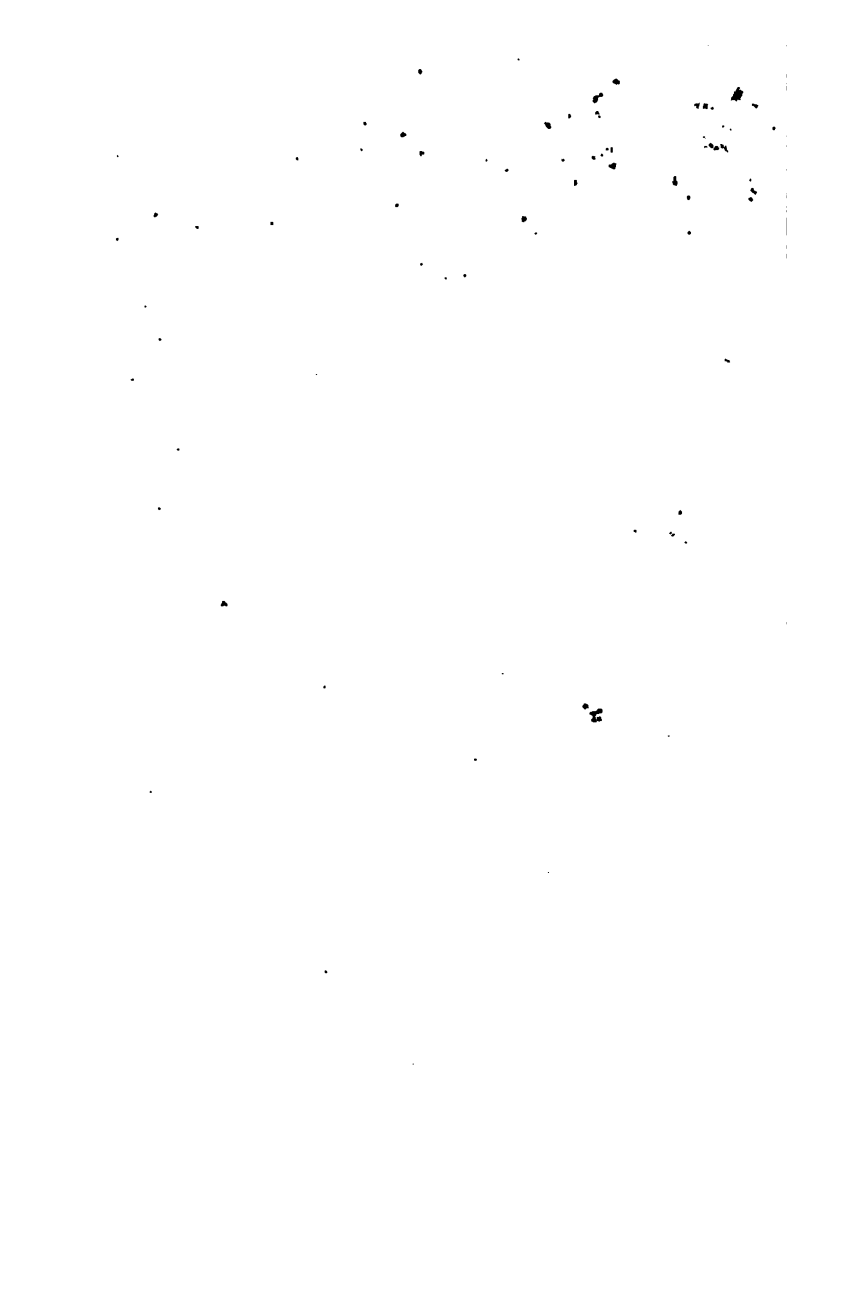
Then let us aim with gladness
To take what God may send;
Nor ever yield to sadness,
Since He will e'er defend;
That all our virtuous toil and strife
May 'stablish us in heavenly life.

And when in distant ages,
In high and holy climes,
We read the illumined pages
That tell of trial-times,
With thankfulness we all shall see,
And satisfied for ever be.

THE END.











the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are undernourished has increased from 600 million to 800 million (FAO 1996). The number of people who are malnourished has increased from 1.2 billion to 1.5 billion (FAO 1996).

There is a growing awareness of the need to improve the nutritional status of the world's population. The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has been instrumental in this regard, and has been successful in increasing the number of people who are undernourished from 600 million in 1990 to 800 million in 1995 (WFP 1996). The WFP has also been successful in increasing the number of people who are malnourished from 1.2 billion in 1990 to 1.5 billion in 1995 (WFP 1996).

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